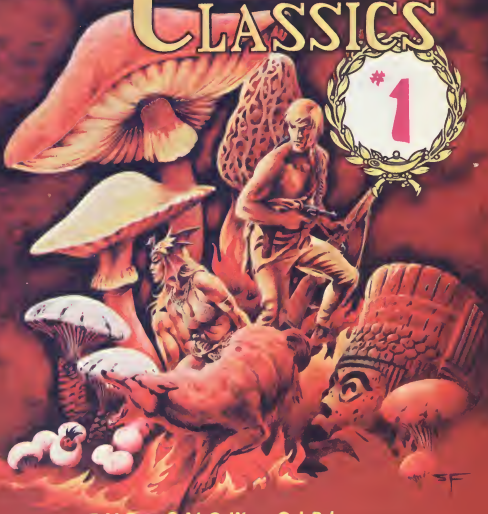


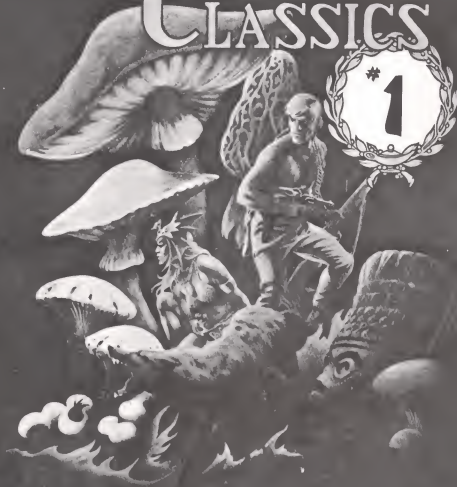
Famous Fantastic CLASSICS



THE SNOW GIRL Complete novel by Ray Cummings

Also — *Tomorrow* by Arthur Leo Zagat • *Creatures of the Ray* by James L. Aton • *The Man in the Moon* by Homer Eon Flint • Over 80,000 words in this issue!

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COLLECTOR'S EDITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The period from 1910 through 1940 has given us numerous classics of fantastic adventure and scientific romance. However, with the exception of *Weird Tales*, it is interesting to note that the science fiction magazines of these decades did not publish very many of these stories. Instead, such recognized classics as "The Moon Pool," "The Blind Spot," "The Girl in the Golden Atom" and numerous others appeared in the general adventure magazines of the time. These magazines include *Argosy*, *All-Story Magazine*, *Adventure*, *Blue Book*, as well as many others.

The reason for this fact is easily deduced. These general adventure magazines had a much greater circulation than the best selling science fiction magazine. Some of the magazines were so popular that they were published weekly. All of them were prestige markets and offered a higher rate per word for accepted material. And they were all much more dependable markets than the financially shaky science fiction magazines of the time.

Thus, in that period, the quality science fiction and fantasy material being published was printed in the non-science fiction magazines. However, in the modern day, the general accepted rule when assembling a collection of fantastic fiction is that the anthologist goes back through the files of early science fiction magazines. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule but not enough to invalidate the generality. The normal editor is unaware of the wealth of unreprinted material which still remains in the now forgotten pulps of fifty years ago.

It is our purpose in FAMOUS FANTASTIC CLASSICS to rescue from oblivion much of that forgotten material published in the pulps of the past which has long since deserved reprinting. We hope to bring back for you classics of scientific romance by authors who were once recognized as masters of their craft and who are now all but forgotten. At the same time, we will also attempt to present some of the rarest classics from this earlier age of science fiction and fantasy adventure.

We purposefully use the words "scientific romance" when referring to the stories we will be reprinting. "Science fiction," as used in that period, seemed to imply that the story was heavy on science and short on story. Many of the stories appearing in the early science fiction magazines were little more than science lectures or speculations with a thin veneer of story to make it acceptable to a fiction-reading audience. Such stories are out-of-date today not only because of obsolete science but because of terrible story-telling. Our goal in this series is to present stories in which the science is a necessary part of the story, but not the

main purpose. As the adventure magazines of the time published stories to entertain, plot and character development were always emphasized over scientific accuracy and detail. The *story* was the thing. Such tales can be read today with the same enjoyment that they inspired decades earlier. We will be reprinting the science *fiction* of earlier times but not the *science fiction* of that period.

Because FAMOUS FANTASTIC CLASSICS is a series of books instead of one large collection of stories, we are able to bring back stories that normally would be too long to republish. We will hold to the policy that a story will be reprinted on merit, not length. Thus we plan to reprint short and long novels as well as short stories in our series. This first book is a perfect example of the editorial freedom that we will use throughout the series.

Our feature story is the complete novel, "The Snow Girl," by Ray Cummings. From his first story in 1919, "The Girl in the Golden Atom," Ray Cummings was hailed as a master of the scientific romance. The popularity of this first story was quickly matched by novel after novel in the same vein, including such works as "The Man Who Mastered Time," "The Shadow Girl" and "The Fire People." Written near the end of his most productive period, Cummings' "The Snow Girl" appeared in *Argosy All-Story* in 1929. It is a fast-moving novel which has lost none of its entertainment value in the 45 years since its original appearance.

Arthur Leo Zagat, who died in 1949, was a prolific pulpster who is best remembered by science fiction fans for his two novels, "Drink We Deep" and "Seven Out of Time," both of which originally appeared as serials in *Argosy*. Less well known was Zagat's series of stories about Dikar and the Bunch, the "Tomorrow" series, which appeared in the early 1940's. With America already feeling the threat of Japanese militarism, Zagat envisioned a future United States ruled by conquerors from across the sea.

"The Man in the Moon" and "Creatures of the Ray" bring back two early and entertaining stories from the early 1920's. Both are scientifically out-of-date but both still retain the charm and interest that made them unique when they first appeared.

This book is but the first of many FAMOUS FANTASTIC CLASSICS to be published by FAX Collector's Editions. For a preview of future books, we invite you to turn to the last page of this publication. Both the editor and the publisher of the series welcome your letters of comment on our selections as well as suggestions you might have for future reprints.

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Tomorrow

What will they be like—those Lost Children of Tomorrow, the survivors of Armageddon? How will they live, and who will lead them? Here is a vivid visualization of their fight back to Civilization, an exciting adventure story, and the portrait of fiction's most striking hero since Tarzan, rolled into one

By **ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT**

Author of "Seven Out of Time," "Drink We Deep," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE LOST ONES

DIKAR was on his knees, his head bowed against the side of his cot, his hands palm to palm. The fragrance of the dried grass with which his mattress was stuffed was in his nostrils, the rabbit fur of his blanket soft and warm against his forehead. Behind him there were two long rows of cots, eleven in each, separated by a wide space. At every cot knelt one of the Bunch, but the only sound was a low drone.

Dikar's own murmur was a part of that drone. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. An should I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Dikar used, as all of them did, the prayer they had learned before the terror had come. They had never been taught another.

Dikar stayed on his knees as behind him there was a rustle of lifting bodies, a chatter of voices. One cried out, loud above the others, "Hey, fellers!" Jimlane it was. "Who took my bow and arrows and didn't bring em back?" His changing voice, deep at first, broke into a high squeal. "If I ketch the guy—"

"They're out by the Fire Stone, foolish." That was Tomball. "I seen you leave

Cautiously the two young savages circled—and the Bunch stood breathless, waiting for first blood



em there yourself. You'll be leavin your head somewhere one these days, an forget where. You're sure the prize dummy of the Bunch."

The other Boys laughed, tauntingly. Dikar heard them, and he didn't quite hear them.

He was waiting for a soft hand to stroke his hair, for sweet, low tones to say, "The good Lord bless you, my son, and give you pleasant dreams." He knew they would not come. Hand and voice were vanished in the mists of Long-ago, curtained from Dikar by the dark Time of Fear before which, as he very dimly recalled, everything had been different from what it was now. But always, when he had said his "now-I-lay-me," he waited for them. . . .

"Quit callin me a dummy," Jimlane squealed. "You gotta quit it."

"Who's gonna make me, dummy? You?"

Dikar rose to his feet, sighing, the burden of his leadership once more heavy upon him.

From the blaze on the Fire Stone, a

wavering light came in through the unglazed, oblong openings in the wall of the long narrow Boys' House. It bathed with red the stalwart, naked bodies; nut-brown skin under which flat muscles moved smoothly.

Tomball was out in the space between the cots, his bulging arms hanging loose at his sides, his adolescent, chunky jaw black-stubbled, his eyes, too closely set, glittering between slitted lids.

Jimlane faced him and was little more than half his size. Puny, his hairless countenance rashed with small pimples, the kid's upper lip trembled but he stood his ground in mid-aisle as the other advanced, slow and threatening.

"Yes, me," Jimlane answered him bravely. "I ain't scared uh you, you big bully."

"You ain't, huh," Tomball grunted, closing the distance between them as Dikar got into motion. "Then I'll teach you to be."

Tomball had hold of Jimlane's wrist and was twisting it, his shadowed lip curling. The smaller lad's face went white with pain. His free hand twisted, batted at his tormentor's hairy belly. Tomball grinned

and kept on twisting. His victim bent almost double, agonized, but still there was no whimper from the youngster. . . .

Dikar's fingers closed on Tomball's arm and dug into the hard muscle. "No fair," Dikar said. "Break!"

TOMBALL loosed Jimlane, jerked free of Dikar's hold and swung around. "Says who?" he growled, a redness in his black, small eyes that was not put there by the light. He was a quarter-head taller than Dikar and broader across the shaggy chest, and his thighs were twice the span of Dikar's. "Oh, it's you!"

"It's me," Dikar said quietly. "An I'm orderin you to quit pickin on Jimlane an on the other little fellows who don't take your guff." Dikar was lean-flanked and lithe-limbed, his hair and his silken beard yellow as the other's was black, his eyes a deep, shining blue.

"There will be no bullyin here, so long as I'm Boss of the Bunch."

Their code, like their talk, had been preserved unchanged from their young childhood, back before the Days of Fear. Isolated, they had no adult models to copy as they grew to young manhood.

"Yeah?" Tomball said through lips thin and straight beneath their sparse covering of sprouting hairs, and somehow Dikar knew what he was going to say next. It had been coming for a long time and now it was here and Dikar was not altogether sorry.

Tomball said it: "As long as you're Boss." Two gray spots pitted the skin at the corners of his flat nose. "Maybe. But it's time you made room for someone else, Dikar. For me."

By Tomball's increasing unwillingness to obey orders, by his sulking and his endless whisperings with those of the Boys who had to be watched lest they shirk their share of work, Dikar had known the challenge was coming.

He had thought out his answer and was ready with it. "All right," he said, low-voiced and very calm. "I'll call a Full Council tomorrow, of the Boys and the

Girls. I'll tell em why I think I should keep on being Boss and you'll tell em why you think I should not, an then the Bunch will decide."

A murmur ran around the ring of Boys that had close-packed about Dikar and Tomball.

"No!" Tomball refused. "It wasn't the Bunch decided you should be Boss in the first place. It was the Old Ones." He paused, and a meaningful grin widened his mouth. "Or so *you* say."

"Maybe," Dikar smiled, surprised he could smile. "Maybe, Tomball, you'd like to ask the Old Ones if they picked me to be Boss when they brought us here and left us. Maybe you'd like to climb down the Drop an ask em whether you or I should be Boss from now on."

The Boys gasped, in the ring around, and Dikar's own skin crawled at the back of his neck.

DOWN, down as far as the Mountain on which the Bunch lived was high, fell the great Drop that fully circled its base. Straight up and down was the Drop's riven rock, and so barren of foothold that no living thing could hope to scale it.

Below, for a space twice as wide across as the tallest of the trees in the forest that robed the Mountain, were tumbled stones as big as the Boy's House and bigger. White and angry waters fumed beneath the stones, and beneath stones and waters were the Old Ones.

Dikar himself had seen these things, from the topmost branch of a certain tree that gave a view of them, but not even Dikar had ever gone out from the concealing curtain of the forest to the brink of the Drop, for of all the Must-Nots the Old Ones had left behind, this was the most fearful; "*You must not go out of the woods. You must not go near the edge of the Drop.*"

Thinking of all this as he stared into the red hate in Tomball's eyes, Dikar asked, "Do you dare, Tomball, climb down the Drop an talk to the Old Ones?"

"Smart," Tomball sneered. "You think

you're smart, don't you? You want me to go down there an that way be rid of me. Well, it don't work, see? I'm just as smart as you are."

Dikar spread his hands. "You will not let the Bunch decide between us, an you will not ask the Old Ones. How, then, do you want this thing settled?"

"How? How have you yourself ordered scraps between the Boys settled? Dikar! I dare you to fight out with me, fists, or sticks or knives even, who's gonna be Boss of the Bunch—you or me."

"No fair," Jimlane cried out at that. "I say it's no fair. Tomball's bigger than Dikar an heavier."

"No fair," Steveland yelled. Billthomas yelled, "We cry the dare no fair." But others were shouting, "*Fight!*" Fredalton and Halross and rabbit-faced Carlberger. "They gotta fight it out. It's Dikar's own Rule an he's gotta stick by it."

Most of the Boys shouted, "Fight!"

"*Shut up!*" Dikar bellowed. "Shut up, all of you," and at once the yelling stopped. But the ring had shrunk till he could feel their breaths on his back and heard little whimpers in the Boys' throats and read their eyes, shining in the changing light of the Fire. "You dare me fight to decide who'll be Boss," Dikar said to Tomball, taking up the ritual he himself had set. "Do you cry a fight between us two fair?"

A cord in Tomball's short neck twitched. "I cry us equal-matched." (By the Rule, Dikar had a right to appeal to the Bunch from Tomball's lying response.) "If you refuse my dare, Dikar, I will cry you yellow, and claim the right about which we scrap." Reading the eyes in the ring, Dikar saw that if he appealed and the Bunch said he and Tomball were not equal-matched, he might remain Boss in name, but Boss in truth he would be no longer. "That is the Rule you yourself have made." Tomball abandoned the ritual. "An you gotta stick by it."

Dikar's lips still smiled. "That is the rule I have made, Tomball. But this over which we scrap is no bird brought down

by an unmarked arrow nor question of whose turn it is to bring water from the spring. Who shall be Boss affects not only you and me, but the whole bunch. Is it right that it be decided in the way such small scraps are decided?" Dikar pretended to ask that of Tomball, but his eyes asked the question of all the eyes in the crowded circle, and the eyes had already answered him when Tomball spoke again.

"It is right." Tomball voiced the verdict of the eyes. "It is the only way that is right. You gotta fight me or crawl." There was triumph in his voice, and triumph in his swagger. Tomball had weight on his side, and reach and strength, and he knew he was already as good as Boss.

Dikar knew it too, and his heart was heavy, but he smiled still. "All right," he said. "We fight, Tomball. With bare fists."

THE Boys hurrahed, the sound like the bay of the dogpack when they've brought down their prey under the trees. Even Steveland and Billthomas hurrahed, and though Jimlane was silent his pale eyes danced with the dancing red light of the Fire.

Dikar listened, thinking what Tomball would do as Boss of the Bunch; whether he would let his pals shirk work, whether he would see that the corn patches were weeded, and the watertank cleaned, and the roofs of the Boys' House and the Girls' House kept patched against the rains and the snows and the cold.

It was worry about these things and others like them that weighted Dikar's heart. He knew how painfully he had learned, in the long years since the Bunch had come to the Mountain, all the many little irksome tasks that must be done for the good of the Bunch; and he remembered that Tomball had always scoffed at them.

For himself Dikar would be happy to be no longer Boss. It meant being lonely—for the Boss must have no pal, lest he be accused of favoring his friend over any other. It meant carrying a heavy freight

of care through the day, and lying sleepless through the night, and never knowing rest. It meant assigning the hunters to the chase, whose joys he never knew; to judging the games and never playing them; to punish when Rules were broken but never breaking Rules just for the fun of it and finding the punishment worth it.

"What are we waiting for?" Tomball's growl broke into Dikar's thoughts. "Come on outside and let's go."

"No," Dikar said. "We fight tomorrow, before the whole Bunch. Tonight, now, we sleep. Already it is Bed-Time, an long past."

"I want to fight now," Tomball insisted, standing his ground. "I don't want to wait till tomorrow."

The smile faded from Dikar's lips, and he felt tiny muscles knot along the ridge of his jaw, beneath his yellow beard. "Bed-Time is not my Rule, but a Rule of the Old Ones. Perhaps, when you are Boss, Tomball, you will let the Bunch break it, but I am still Boss, an I do not. To bed, Tomball. To bed, all of you. Right away!"

Dikar's eyes locked with Tomball's, and blue eyes and black held for a long minute and there was no sound in the Boys' House, and no movement at all. Then the black eyes fell, and Tomball muttered, "It's the Old Ones I obey, Dikar, not you," and the ring broke up into Boys hurrying to their cots.

Dikar stood spread-legged, the firelight playing on his tall, well-knit form, his chest moving quietly with his slow breathing, the taut hollow of his belly heaving, his eyes somber as he watched the Boys obey him—perhaps for the last time.

He didn't feel Jimlane's fingers squeeze his. He didn't hear Jimlane's whisper, "I hope you win tomorrow, Dikar. Gee, how I hope you win."

Dikar stood there while the curtains woven from slender withes were dropped over the window-openings, shutting out the red light of the Fire that the Girls tended tonight.

He stood there, unmoving, till the excited

whisperings along the walls of the Boys' House had faded, and the scrape of the fur blankets along skin had ended, and there were no more creakings. Then he turned and padded to his own cot, and knelt beside it.

Dikar's lips moved, but the words came soundless. He was sending them out through the wall, past the leaping flames on the great, flat Fire Stone, past the Girls' House into the night-darkened woods.

He was speaking to a Presence there, a Someone he had never seen and never heard, but had always known to be there, because He showed His work in the carpet of the leaves underfoot, in the tall and stately trees, in the wind that rustled through the woods' green roof and the sunlight that shimmered through it.

"I don't care what happens to me tomorrow, Sir," Dikar told Him. "I don't care how much Tomball hurts me, or what he does to me if he wins. It's the Bunch I ask you to take care of. Please, Sir. If Tomball is too strong for me, tomorrow, an he licks me, please make it all right for him to be Boss. Please make him smart enough to be a good Boss. Please make him be a better Boss for the Bunch than me. They're good kids, Sir, the Boys an the Girls, an mostly they obey the Rules the Old Ones left, an You ought to take care of them. You will take care of them, Sir, won't you?"

Dikar's lips stopped moving, but he stayed on his knees a little while longer, his head bent as if he were listening.

He heard nothing but the soft breathing sounds, and the wind's treetop whisper, and the insect chorus of the night.

When at last he stirred and climbed into his cot and drew his fur blanket up over him he was comforted.

CHAPTER II

THE NIGHTMARE THAT WAS TRUE

SLEEP'S deep emptiness claimed Dikar swiftly and wholly, as always it claims one whose weariness is clean and physical.

A voice came into the nothingness, the voice for which Dikar waited each Bed-Time after he'd said his Now-I-lay-me.

. . . Mom's voice it was that came through the open door of the dark room where Dick Carr had awakened. Something in Mom's voice made Dick afraid: tears, and a trying hard to hide the tears, and a smile that he somehow knew hurt Mom more than the tears.

"Take care of yourself," Mom was saying, "and come back soon."

Who was going away? There was only Mom and Dick in the flat, and Henry who was twelve, four years older than Dick, and who took up more than his half of their bed. Dick pushed out to wake Henry, and his hand found only bunched sheets.

Henry wasn't there!

The next minute Dick heard Henry out in the hall. "Sure, I'll come back soon. Don't you worry. This thing will be over in a jiffy, you'll see. We're just being called out because—because the last big drive is on, an' they need us in the rear lines so's all the real soldiers can be free to do the fightin'. There ain't nothin' to worry about, Mom. They can't lick us. Maybe they've licked the rest uh the world but they can't lick the good old U. S. A. We've won every war we were ever in an' we'll win this one—

"Look Mom, I got to run. The radio said for my unit to be at the Eighth Street Armory at eleven o'clock, an' it's four o', now. Goo'bye, Mom."

There was a kiss, and the flat-door slamming shut, and then there wasn't any sound coming in through the door at all and the flat seemed awful empty.

In through the window rang the clatter of feet running in the street. Dick heard it every night, listening to the big boys who didn't have to go to bed early and could play in the street after supper. But Dick knew they weren't playing now, because they all ran the one way and after a little while he didn't hear them any more.

Then Dick lay listening to the thunder

that had been in the sky so long he usually didn't hear it. The thunder seemed a little louder tonight, and a little nearer, and more scary. The glass in the window kept rattling and that made Dick look at the window and at the square gold-starred flag that hung in the window.

The star was for Pop. It was to show everybody how proud we were that Pop was a hero. Only Dick didn't quite understand why we should be proud when every window in the block had a flag with a gold star, a lot of them even with two or three gold stars.

What was there to be proud about in your Pop being a hero when all the other kids' fathers were heroes too, and their big brothers, and a lot of their sisters too, being Red Cross nurses and working in ammunition plants that was blown up and all?

Dick wished Pop would stop being a hero and come home.

Mom and Henry said Pop wasn't ever going to come home, but Dick didn't believe that. Dick didn't believe Pop would go away from them forever and ever.

Now Henry was gone away too. But he was coming back soon. He had told Mom he was, hadn't he? He wouldn't lie to Mom, would he?

Dick heard the sound of feet again, coming down the street. The feet weren't running now. They were marching. Dick knew what feet sounded like when they were marching. He'd heard them before Pop went away, when you could hardly hear them for the crowds shouting and the bands braying soldier-music.

He'd heard the feet marching when Pop went away; there were no bands then, and no hurrahs, and there were hardly anybody in the street, only in the windows a lot of women, waving handkerchiefs, and then holding them up to their faces.

Yes, Dick had heard a lot of marching feet, but they had never sounded quite like these. The sound of them feet wasn't nearly as loud as the others.

Dick pushed back the covers and got to the window. The tops of the street lights

were painted black, and the bottoms were blue; so that the gutter was like blue water, deep and awful, and across the street was only a black and dreadful wall.

Down the street came the marchers.

THEY were boys like Henry, some of them bigger and some smaller, but none of them very much bigger or very much smaller. Each had a gun slanted across his shoulder. Not one was in uniform. They were dressed in their everyday clothes, caps and jackets and pants. Some of the boys wore longies, most wore knickers or shorts, and a lot were barelegged down to the socks folded over the tops of their shoes. They were like a bunch of boys marching out of school on a fire-drill.

They were not playing soldiers. They *were* soldiers, real soldiers. The way they marched showed that, straight-backed, not talking or laughing. Their chins were lifted. Their eyes looked far ahead, to the end of the street and the end of the city and farther still, to the dark night out of which came the sound of thunder that never stopped.

Four abreast they marched, four and four and four, as far as Dick Carr could see. And alongside each tenth four marched a man in uniform; a man with one empty sleeve pinned to the breast of his coat: a man whose leg swung stiff so that Dick knew it was not a leg at all: a man whose face was broken so it was ugly and terrible as a Hallowe'en mask.

For a long time the boys and the broken men marched by, to where the thunder rolled and the black sky flickered with a lightning whose flashes Dick Carr could not see. . . .

(And Dikar's dream faded into sleep's nothingness.)

. . . And into sleep's nothingness came a crash of thunder, shaking the ground. It shook Mom's arms that were tight around Dick Carr, and her body against which Dick's face was pressed. Out of the corner of his eye Dick could see the pin on Mom's black breast. The pin was oblong, and

it had a blue border, and on the white inside the border there were two gold stars. There were two on the flag in the window now.

Dick was scared, but he wasn't hawling. He hadn't bawled when the siren waked him up, screaming in through the window, nor when Mom and he had jumped out of bed, all dressed like the radio said they should be. He hadn't bawled when, the siren screaming like a great devil in the black sky, they ran in the dark street, and then stopped running because all the women and kids were carrying them along in a rush faster than Dick could run.

No, Dick hadn't bawled even when he and Mom had fallen down the station steps and the old man had dragged them through the big, stiff curtains into the station.

The station was crowded with women and kids, and it was like an ogre's cave. A couple of electric lights made light enough to see them by, but not enough to keep back the shadows that reached out of the enormous black holes at each end of the station, like black arms pawing out to drag the women and the kids into a night that would never end.

The faces he saw were a queer white, and the eyes were too big; and they were sort of hunched, as if they were waiting for something terrible to pounce on them out of the dark.

It came!

Thunder! Thunder louder than before, thunder so loud that when it stopped Dick couldn't hear himself say, "Don't be scared, Mom. I'll take care of you." But Mom must have heard him, because she squeezed him tighter to her and kissed him on top of his head.

Then Dick could hear again. He could hear a woman say, "That must have been one them half-ton bombs. They tell me they can go right down through a ten-story building, and they don't blow up till they hit the cellar, and after they blow up there ain't nothin' left of the building or anyone was in it. Nothin' at all."

The old man, who stood by the brown

curtain that hung over where the station steps came in, laughed. His laugh was like the cackle of the hens Dick used to hear when Pop used to drive him and Henry and Mom out into the country.

"Yeah," the old man cackled, his eyes kind of wild. "That's right. Ef'n one o' them things hits overhead here they won't even be little pieces of us left ter pick up."

He had on a uniform, but it wasn't like Pop's uniform. It was very faded but you could see it had once been blue. It was ragged and much too big.

THERE was thunder again, not so loud. "Well," said a woman sitting with a suckling baby in her heavy arms. "I wish one *would* hit right over us. That would be God's mercy."

"There ain't no God," someone said. "God is dead." Then whoever it was laughed, and Dick's insides cringed from the laughter. It was a woman in the middle of the platform, and she was standing as still as a rock; her mouth didn't move, and the eyes behind the hair that was down all over her face saw nothing at all. "The End of the World is come and it is too late to repent. We are doomed—"

Thunder again shattering the laughter, but far away now. The woman who sat next to Mom, with a little girl on her lap and another, brown-haired and brown-eyed and pretty, on the floor alongside of her whispered: "Poor thing, I hear tell she escaped from Philadelphia after it was surrendered. She got through the lines somehow. Did you hear how they went through all the houses that was left and dragged out—?"

"Hush," Mom begged. "Hush. The children—"

The little girl's mother laughed quietly. "The children will know all about it soon. Yours too. Girls or boys, it don't make no difference to those fiends."

"Not mine," Mom said, very low, and she moved a little to show the other woman what was in her hand. It was a carving knife from their kitchen—

"Attention!" A loud voice shouted out of the place where you used to get your change before the subways stopped running. "*Attention, all shelters!*" Dick looked and he saw there was a radio behind the little hole where your money used to be pushed out. "*The raid is over! The raid is over—*"

"It's over," the old man cackled. "And I'm still alive. Eighty-three years old and not dead yet. I allus said I was born ter be hanged."

"—where you are. Remain where you are. Gas-tests are being made. Remain where you are until gas-tests determine that it is safe to leave. Stand by."

"The government should of gave us all gas masks," grumbled a fat lady whom Dick knew. "Like they did in England." She was Tom Ball's mother and Tom was behind her, hiding his face in her skirts.

"Much good that did England," the woman with the baby said. "Much good anything did England—"

"Attention!" the radio shouted. "*Attention all shelters. Important. An important announcement is about to be made. Stand by.*"

"Mom," Dick asked. "What is a 'portant annou—what the radio said?"

"News, son. Big news."

"Good news, Mom?"

"Maybe. Maybe we've won the battle. Maybe we're driving Them—"

"Attention! Attention, all shelters. The next voice you hear will be that of General Edward Albright, provost-marshal-general for this area."

"That's Ed Albright," the old man cackled. "I remember when he was a buck private along o' me," the both of us down with dysentery at Key West. In the Spanish War that was, an'—"

"Hush. Hush, you old fool. . . ."

The voice Dick heard now, coming into a quiet so deep he could hear Mom's heart beating in his ear, was thin and tired, awful tired. "Our lines are crumbling. Enemy infantry has already penetrated to the outskirts of the city, south and east. The boys, the young women, who have

fought so heroically, are still fighting, but there is no longer any hope. Word has come that the columns that were marching to our aid have been completely wiped out by a phalanx of enemy planes."

CHAPTER III

AFTER ARMAGEDDON

THE voice stopped, and there wasn't any sound at all. "We are beaten," the voice began again. "But we shall not surrender. We shall not give over the mothers and the children of this city to the horror that has overtaken the other municipalities that have surrendered.

"My people, when our lines finally break, when the enemy hordes swarm in, I shall press a button on the desk before me to set off mines that have been laid underneath the streets. Every soul in the city will perish in that cataclysm; I, and you, and with us some thousands of those who have made this world of ours a hell."

"Good!" yelled the woman with the babe at her breast. "Good!"

Mom's arms were tight around Dick, and she was crying, but her eyes were shining. "We're going to see Henry soon, son, and your father," she whispered. "Isn't that wonderful?"

And then everyone was quiet again, and the tired voice was still talking.

"To die like that will be, I know, no sacrifice to you who have laid fathers and husbands, sons and daughters, on the altar of your country. But there is one more sacrifice I must ask of you, for your country.

"Somehow, in the maneuvering of the past few hours, a gap has opened in the enemy lines, to the north. It is already being closed, but the terrain is such that a small and determined force may be able to keep it open long enough for a few to escape.

"No troops can be moved from their present positions. We have some arms, some ammunition, available, but no one to use them. No one—except you women who hear me. You mothers."

"That's funny," Mrs. Ball sniffed. "We can escape through a hole if we get ourselves killed keepin' the hole open. The man must be crazy."

"If you mothers can keep that gap open long enough, we may be able to take your children out through it, the tots who are all you have left.

"We may—the possibility is infinitesimal—be able to get them away to the hills north of the city. The chances are that they will die on the way. Even if they do not, it is possible that they will be hunted down and exterminated, that Nature, though less cruel than these hordes that have come out of the East and across the continent from the West and up from the South, will finish the work of our foes.

"But there is a million-to-one chance that the children will come through, and it rests with you to choose whether we shall give them that chance.

"I know that it is a bitter choice to make. I know, mothers, that you would rather that your little daughter, your little son, when I press this button on my desk, go with you into the Outer Darkness where there is peace at last.

"I know how dreadful it would be for you to die not knowing what fate awaits your children, and I should not ask you to make the choice save for this one thing.

"This is the dusk of our day, the dusk of democracy, of liberty, of all that has been the America we lived for, and die for. If there is to be any hope of a tomorrow, it must rest in them, in your sons and daughters.

"If they perish, America shall have perished. If through your sacrifice they survive, then, in some tomorrow we cannot foresee, America will live again and democracy, liberty, freedom shall reconquer the green and pleasant fields that tonight lie devastated.

"If you choose to give America this faint hope, if you decide to make this sacrifice, leave your children in charge of the warden of the shelter where you are, and come at once to headquarters to re-

ceive your weapons and your orders.

"We have no way of telling what your decision is until and unless enough of you come here to make the attempt we contemplate feasible. We wait for you. Will you come? Mothers, the choice is yours."

THE voice stopped, and for a long time nobody moved, nobody said a thing. Then, all of a sudden, all the women were standing up. All the women were kissing their kids, and then they were going toward the curtain that hung over the bottom of the steps from the station.

They were pushing aside the brown curtain. They were going up the steps.

They were going fast, fast, and their faces were shining as Dick once had seen a bride's face shine as she walked, all in white, up the aisle.

They were all gone, and in the station there were only the kids, and the old, old man in the uniform of faded blue that was too big for him.

It seemed darker here in the ogre's cave. The dark reached out from the great black holes at the ends of the platform—

A small, cold hand took hold of Dick's hand. "I'm frightened," the little brown-haired girl whimpered.

"Aw," Dick said, squeezing her hand. "There ain't nothin' to be frightened about. I'll take care of you."

"Will you," she asked in a very little voice. "Do you promise?"

"Cross my heart," Dick said, "I'll take care of you, always and always," and somehow he wasn't quite so frightened any more. "What's your name?"

"Mary Lee. What's yours?"

"Dick Carr."

"Dickar," she murmured, and moved close to Dick, and her head dropped sleepily on his shoulder.

He liked the way she said it: "Dickar," so he didn't bother to tell her it was two names. He said "Marilee" in his head, making one name out of her two, and he liked the sound of that. . . .

And a shadow moved across Dick Carr.

. . . A shadow moved across Dickar,

and he stirred and came fully awake out of his dream, and it seemed to him that someone had passed him, moving silently in the night.

CHAPTER IV

WE MEET IN THE NIGHT

DICKAR lay in his cot, alert. The sloughing of the wind came to him, and the shrilling of the insects of the night and the breathing of the sleeping Boys. There was no sound at all out of tune with the harmony of the dark forest.

Yet Dikar was troubled with an uneasy sense of something wrong.

He tried to quiet himself, tried to find sleep again, sleep and the dream out of which he had awakened. Dikar was desperate to find his dream again, for he knew it was one he had dreamed many times. But always before it had slipped from him in the instant of waking, and tonight it was still as vivid in his mind as yesterday.

The small boy of the dream, Dick Carr, was himself in the Long-Ago that had been only a mist of gray half-memories as shapeless as the dawn-haze that drifts in the waking forest. The dream had told Dikar something of himself and something of that Long-Ago, and if he could find it again it would tell him more.

But Dikar could not find sleep again, nor the dream, because his eagerness barred the way, and his sense of something wrong with the night. So he sighed and rose from his cot, making no sound.

He groped for his apron of woven leaves and tied it about his waist, and stole to the curtain of twined withes that closed the door, moving it a little to peer out.

The leafy boughs of a great oak made a roof that joined the roofs of the Boys' House and the Girls' House, at the end where they came nearest the woods. Beneath it the Fire was burning low on its Stone, and a little distance away from its heat Dikar saw the two Girls whose task it was tonight to tend the Fire.

The two Girls drowsed, arms about each

other's waists. They had undone their braids, and the hair that cloaked one was black as the night, and the hair that cloaked the other was brown and shining. The black hair swallowed the light, but tiny red glints from the Fire danced merrily on the wavy fall of the brown.

The Girls wore short skirts of plaited grasses, and circlets of woven leaves covered their deepening breasts; but through their cloaks of long hair a shoulder peeped shyly, and a rounded knee, and curve of a thigh.

Now as long as he could recall Dikar had seen the brown bodies of the girls as they busied themselves with their tasks or tried to outdo the Boys in the Games, and so it was strange that tonight these small glimpses should set a pulse throbbing in his temples, and stir his breast with a not unpleasant pain.

It was to the Girl whose hair was brown that his eyes clung, to her knee and the soft swell of her throat, and the pale oval of her face.

As he looked out at her, he seemed to feel a small hand in his, to hear a very little voice asking, "Will you take care of me? Promise?" For this was Marilee, the little girl of his dream. Dikar had forgotten his promise, "I'll take care of you always and always," but now he remembered it.

Remembering, he wanted to hold out his arms to Marilee, wanted to call her to him. He almost did, and for fear that he might, looking at her, not longer be able to hold her name in his throat, he tore his eyes from her and turned them to the Fire. Little flames, blue and yellow and red, licked along the sides of a single log that lay across a great heap of orange-glowing embers. That log will not last much longer, Dikar thought. I should wake the Girls and tell them to put more on.

Then he thought, No. Let them sleep. I'll do it myself; and with the thought his look went to the pile of logs at the base of the oak.

. . . To the place where the pile ought to be! There was only one split log there.

Queer, Dikar thought. I sent up enough for the night from where we were cutting them in the woods yesterday—A hand slid past the trunk of the oak, out of the blackness behind! The hand took hold of the one log that was left of the pile and drew it back into the blackness.

A muscle twitched in Dikar's cheek, under his beard.

"Oh," Bessalton exclaimed, the black-haired girl. "Marilee! We've been sleepin an the Fire's almost out. Quick."

THEY were running to the Fire, and past it to the oak, and they were looking, dismayed at the base of the oak. "There isn't any," Marilee said, her small face puckered in puzzlement. "You must have put on the last."

"I did no such thing," Bessalton denied. "It was you. You were the last one to put wood on. Remember?"

"Yes," Marilee said slowly. "Yes, I was the last. But there was more here then. I'm sure there was."

"Looks like it," the black-haired girl came back, "Don't it? If I did something like that—"

"Oh what's the use of scrapping about it? We've got to get more up from the place where the Boys were cutting, before the Fire burns out."

"We?"

"I'll do it, Bessalton. I know where they were," Marilee said, and before Dikar could move or cry out, she had gone past the oak and the night had swallowed her. The night out of which a hand had slid to draw away the logs from the base of the oak!

Dikar sprang to his cot, snatched up his bow and quiver of arrows, was back to the door and out through it. Bessalton stared at the Fire; she neither saw nor heard Dikar flitting by. Then the damp, fragrant dark of the woods was about him, and the cool softness of its carpet of leaves was under his noiseless feet, and he was a shadow slipping through the forest.

All the Bunch was taught to move in the woods with the silence of its creatures,

but Dikar's ears, trained to keenness, caught the barely audible sound of Marilee's progress ahead of him, the flick of underbrush against her legs.

He did not call to warn her, because he needed to know who had lured her into the forest, and why. This was a thing that never before had been done by one of the Bunch and Dikar must find out why it was being done.

Moonlight filtered through the foliage overhead and flecked the night with silver. A small beast scuttered away from beneath Dikar's feet. Marilee was well away from the Houses now. She was almost to the place where the Boys had been cutting—

"Oh!" he heard her exclaim, and then there was another voice ahead there. "Hello, Marilee." Tomball's voice. "I've been waitin for you."

Dikar froze, as motionless as the tree trunks about him.

"You've been waitin—" Marilee was puzzled. "Why? Why should you be here, waitin for me?"

"I wanted to see you alone."

"But—but why do you want to see me alone?"

"Marilee." Tomball's voice was curiously thick. "Do you like me?"

"Of course I like you. I like all the Boys."

"Not that way. Do you like me—like this?" Dikar heard the sound of flesh, and he sprang into the little clearing ahead, and Tomball's hands had hold of Marilee's arms, and he was pulling her to him.

"Stop!" Dikar said, low-voiced, and somehow there was an arrow hooked in the string of his bow, and the string was tight, and the arrow was pointed at Tomball's back. The bow was long almost as Dikar was tall, and the arrow sharp-pointed with stone. Loosed, it could go clear through a deer—or a Boy. "Let go of her."

TOMBALL turned on Dikar. Crouched knee-deep in fern there was something about him more animal than Boy. The

curling thickness of his lips; the feral look of his black eyes, and the way his neck was tense and corded.

"You—" Tomball grunted. "You again!"

"Me," Dikar said, heavy-tongued with anger. "The Boss. Tomball, you have left your cot before day. You have laid hands on a Girl. For breakin these Must-Nots you are subject to seven days in the punishment cave, with only water and dried corn to eat. What's your excuse?"

Tomball licked his lips, and straightened. "Nothin," he said. "Because you won't give me the punishment."

"Won't I? An why not?"

"Because I'm not here, that's why. Because I'm in my cot, asleep. Halross will say so at the Council, an Carlberger."

"They will lie?" Dikar's brow wrinkled. He could not understand. "They will lie, at a Council?"

"Sure, they will. What are you goin to do about it?"

"But Marilee here will say different, an I."

"Course you will," Tomball grinned. "Why shouldn't you, the Boss of the Bunch an the Boss of the Girls? Why shouldn't you say that I left my cot, and that I laid hands on her, when seven days in the punishment cave on water an dried corn will leave me so weak you'll be sure to lick me, an stay Boss? Will the Bunch believe you, Dikar, when I remind em of that, or will they believe me an Halross an Carlberger?"

Dikar felt sick. That any should lie at a Council, that any should talk as he was hearing Tomball talk, was a new and dreadful thing. "Tomball," he cried. "You're foolin. You wouldn't really say those things."

"Wouldn't I?" Tomball grinned, licking his lips. "Just try me. You're licked, Dikar, an you know it."

Dikar knew it, and he knew that a terrible thing had come among them, and he could not think how to fight it. He was licked—

"Dikar!" Marilee's fingers touched his arm. "Dikar. Hold him here with your

arrow while I run and call the Bunch. When they see Tomball here in the woods, he an his pals cannot say that he is in his cot, asleep." She started away.

"Wait!" Tomball's command halted Marilee. "You can call the Bunch, Marilee," he said. "But when they get here I'll tell em that Dikar drew his arrow on me an forced me to come here. An Hal-ross will say that, wakin from sleep in his cot next mine, he saw this, an that Dikar said he would kill him if he did not keep quiet."

Marilee and Dikar stared at Tomball.

"You can't win," Tomball sneered. "I'm too smart for you, see. An tomorrow you'll find out I'm too strong for you, Dikar. An here's somethin else for you to remember, Marilee. When I'm Boss, you better like me the way I want you to like me!"

He laughed, then, and turning his back on Dikar's arrow, and swaggered away; they heard his laugh coming out of the dark woods.

"What did he mean?" Marilee whispered, coming close to Dikar. He said, 'When I'm Boss'. What did he mean, Dikar?"

Dikar wanted to put his arms around her.

"He meant that we're gunna fight who should be Boss, Marilee. In the mornin, right after Brekfes, you will call a Full Council of the Bunch, an Tomball an I will fight who shall be Boss."

Marilee's eyes were upturned to his eyes, her lips were moist and red. "You must win, Dikar," she whispered. "You heard what he said. You *must* win."

The wanting to take her in his arms, the wanting to hold her close to him, was a great ache in Dikar's arms and in his breast, and a weakness in his legs.

"I heard him, Marilee," he said, deep-throated. "I will win."

And then Dikar turned and ran off through the woods, but he looked back over his shoulder at Marilee once and saw the way she stood looking after him, mantled in her brown hair, and he saw the look in her face.

WHEN Dikar got back to the Boys' House and slipped inside, all was dark there, and quiet, and Tomball was in his cot. Dikar put down his bow and arrow, and took off his apron. He lay down again, and pulled up the blanket of rabbit's fur.

He lay staring up at the black roof of the house, trembling a little. It seemed to him that he saw Tomball's face there, black-stubbled and small-eyed and sneering. And then it was Marilee's face he saw, the red lips moist, the brown eyes holding his, telling something her lips could not. And looking into Marilee's eyes, Dikar's eyes closed and the nothingness of sleep received him. . . . And out of sleep's nothingness formed a sky that flared with blue light, and with red, and was streaked with bright yellow that shimmered and faded; and the sky was filled with rolling, endless thunder. Against that terrible sky loomed monstrous black bulks, huge and ominous, hills that overhung a road and a big truck in which Dick Carr was riding.

In the truck kids were jammed so tight they could not lie down, and just could move a very little. Dick was in a corner, so that his back was jammed against the iron sides of the truck, and Marilee was jammed against his side, and her head was on Dick's shoulder, and she slept.

Most of the kids were asleep, in spite of the terrible lights in the sky and the awful thunder. But the old man who was driving the truck wasn't asleep, nor the old woman who sat next to him. Ahead of them on the road were a lot of trucks, and behind them were a lot more trucks, but Dick could tell this only by the noise they made, because none of the trucks had any lights.

Dick knew some of the trucks were loaded high with boxes and boxes of things, but most of them were jammed tight with kids like this one.

"Tom," Dick heard the old woman ask. "Do you think we'll get through?"

"I don't know, Helen," the old man answered. "Only God knows. So you had better pray to God to take us through."

"I can't, Tom. I can't pray any more. I'm all prayed out. God cannot hear our prayers. He has forgotten us, Tom. He has turned His face from us."

"Pray, Helen. Not for you or for me, but for the children in our charge. Pray to God's Son. It was God's Son who once said, 'Suffer ye the little children to come unto Me.'"

"All right, Tom. I'll try."

They didn't say anything more. The truck bounced along, and the red and blue lights flared in the sky, and yellow streaked it, and thunder rolled.

Once the road got steep, climbing up into the sky to what looked like the Jumping-Off Place, and up there against the sky Dick saw things that stuck up out of the top of the black hill. They were just a bunch of broken poles, black against the blazing sky, but Dick knew that once they had been trees. And to one side there was a chimney sticking up, and Dick knew that was all that was left of a house that the trees used to shade.

Dick started to get sleepy. His eyes closed. The old woman woke him up, yelling something.

"Tom!" she yelled. "Tom! Turn into this sideroad. Quick!"

DICK'S head banged against the truck side, and the kids fell against him, and Marilee woke up, screaming, "Dikar! Dikar!" Dick grabbed hold of her, telling her it was all right, and then the truck wasn't going any longer, and Dick could hear the other trucks going past, somewhere behind.

"You caught me off guard, Helen, and I did it," the old man said. "But why?"

"I don't know, Tom," she answered, talking slow. "I saw the sideroad ahead and something told me we must turn off into it. It was like a voice in my ear. No. It was more like a voice in my brain."

"You're all worked up, Helen. You're excited." Tom's back moved, and there was

a noise of grinding metal. "Watch out behind. I'm backing up to the highway. As soon as you see a clear space you tell me, so that I can back out and get into line again. If we lose the others we won't know where to—" And then there was a white light in the sky, a light bright as the sun floating down out of the sky.

And there was a new sound in the sky, like a bee, like a giant bee, and it became a roar. An enormous black shape came down under the light, and there was a rattling noise, like a lot of boys were running sticks along a lot of picket fences, but louder, and there were screams and crashes and the rattling noise kept on.

The rattling noise cut off, and the roar faded and became a bee-buzz again and the bee-buzz died away in the sky. There were no more crashes, and no more screams. There was only the rolling thunder overhead, that never stopped.

Old Tom got down from his seat, and went away into the dark. The old woman sat very still, and all the kids sat very still, and nobody moved. After awhile the old man was back, and he was climbing up again to the truck driver's seat.

"Well?" Helen asked, so low Dick could hardly hear her.

"None," Tom said. "Not one of them all. We're the only ones left. If we hadn't turned in here—" He didn't finish.

"I guess," Helen said. "I guess God is still listening, up there above the sound of the guns." And then she said, "Where do we go from here?"

"There's a smashed signpost back there, where this road turns off. One of the boards on it reads, 'To Johnson's Quarry.' Do you remember, Helen, my heading a committee once that tried to stop the Johnson Granite Company from cutting down a mountain. They were defacing the landscape, you recall, and we wanted to preserve the beauties of Nature for posterity."

He laughed. It wasn't pretty, that laugh. "We failed. Recently I heard that they had blasted away almost the entire base of the mountain, leaving only a narrow ramp by which their trucks could reach

their camp at the top. There are probably quarters for the laborers up there, perhaps some supplies. The mountain, as I remember, is thickly wooded and there's a possibility we may be safely enough concealed there, at least for a time."

"If only we can get through to it."

"We can try. This is a State Park we are in. There are woods almost all the way, and nothing to attract enemy patrols." The truck started running again.

(Dikar's dream blurred.)

The thunder faded out of it, and the dark, and there was sunlight, with green trees, and a wide cleared space with two long houses each side of it, with cots and a wallless house at one end in which there were big stoves, and a lot of tables. There were a bunch of little kids and there were the two Old Ones.

THE Old Ones made the kids work. Helen made the girls make beds and cook and things like that. Tom made the boys go down the road up which the truck came that first night and hammer deep holes into the hill of rock on top of which the road climbed up to where the trees were. When Tom thought the holes were deep-enough he would put fat white sticks into them that he got out of a big red box they had found where the road started to climb up, and little, silvery things on top of the sticks.

When it would begin to get dark, they would all eat, and then the Old Ones would make the bunch all sit around and they would tell them things.

They called this a Council. At the first Council the two Old Ones told the Bunch a lot of things they should do, and they should not do, and these were the Rules. The Old Ones said Marilee should be Boss of the Girls, and they said Dick should be Boss of the Boys, and of the whole Bunch.

Every morning one of the Boys would climb up high in a tree and watch all day if anybody would come out of the woods on the other side of the fields down there where Tom and the Boys were working.

The Boys took turns doing this. One day (and this is where Dikar's dream got clear again) Dikar was sitting on top of the tree. The boys had got through making the holes yesterday, and they weren't down there any more. They were in the front of the house where they slept, and Tom was teaching them how to make bows and arrows. The Girls were in front of their house and Helen was teaching them how to make baskets out of twigs from the bushes in the woods.

Dick was looking at the black smoke, way far off in the sky, that had been there all the time since they came here. He thought about a new Rule the Old Ones had made at Council last night, a Rule they said was most important of all. "You must not go out of the woods," the Rule said. "You must not go near the edge of the Drop."

Wondering why the Old Ones had made that rule, Dick looked down at the edge of the Drop, and at the place where the road climbed up and over it. His eyes went along the road, and across the fields, and he saw someone come out of the woods across there.

The someone looked very little, way down there, but Dick could see he had a kind of dark-green uniform on, and that his face was yellow. Then another one and another one came out of the woods. These were in green too, but their faces were black, and they had guns. All of a sudden there were a lot of them.

Dick yelled down, "Coo-eee! Coo-eee!" and when Tom looked up at him Dick pointed down at the men in the green uniforms and held up his spread fingers and wagged them to show Tom how many there were.

Tom started running into the woods, and then he came out on the other side of them, where the road came up over the edge of the Drop, and he was running down the road. And then Helen was running after him, and Tom saw her. Tom yelled something and she stopped, but she didn't go back.

Tom had a little hammer in his hand.

Dick heard a crack, like a twig breaking, and he looked down and down, and across the fields, and he saw that the men in green had their guns up to their shoulders, and he saw a little white puff of smoke floating away from one of them. Then he saw white puffs come out of all the guns.

Dick looked back at Tom, and just then Tom fell down, but he didn't stop. He was crawling down the road, and Helen was running down it now, running fast.

A lot of cracks came to Dick's ear, and across the fields the air was full of the little white puffs. On the road Helen caught up with Tom and was lifting him up, and then he was leaning on her and the two of them were running down again.

The men in green started running across the fields, stopping every couple of steps to shoot at Tom and Helen, but the old ones got down to the bottom of the road, and around inside of where the road started to climb up out of the fields, and the men in green stopped shooting because they couldn't see them any more, but they kept on running.

Dick could see the Old Ones. They were standing near the rocky wall of the hill the road climbed on, Helen's arm around Tom, and the first of the men in green came around to where he could see them.

Tom lifted his little hammer and hit the rock with it. A cloud of dust hid the Old Ones, and Dick heard a boom, and then there was another boom, and another, and one so loud it filled the whole world. The hill the road climbed on leaned away from the rest of the Mountain, and it started to fall.

It fell slowly at first, and then faster and faster, down on where the Old Ones were, and on the men in green, and the noise was so loud Dick couldn't hear any noise at all, and the air was so full of dust it was like night.

The whole mountain shook, and the tree Dick was in shook so hard Dick had to grab hold of it to keep from being shaken off, and his hands started to slip, and—

(Dikar awoke. . . .)

D IKAR lay in his cot, his eyes still closed, remembering his dream, fitting the things it had shown him into the things he knew, seeing how it explained a lot that had always puzzled him.

It explained the Rule that no fire must ever be made except with wood so dry that it would burn without smoke, and the Rule that no fire must ever burn at night except the big Fire on the Fire Stone, and why the big Fire was set not in the center of the space between the Boys' House and the Girls' House but at one end, where it was hidden from the sky by the spreading leafy top of the giant oak. It explained the Rule that when there was a noise in the sky like a bee buzzing, everyone must run into the Houses or into the woods and stay very still until the sound was gone.

But most of all it explained the Must-Not about going out of the edge of the woods, about going to the edge of the Drop.

They were down there, in the woods across the space of tumbled stones at the bottom of the Drop, beneath which the Old Ones lay. Dressed in green, with black faces and yellow faces. They were in the woods, and in all the far country Dikar could see when he climbed the tall tree. If They saw any of the Bunch come to the top of the Drop and so found out that the Bunch lived on the Mountain, They would come and do to the Bunch what, in his dream, They did to all the kids on that terrible night in the Long-Ago.

Dikar knew now how the Bunch had come to the Mountain, and he knew now that the Bunch could not always stay here on the Mountain. Some day he must lead the Bunch down the Drop, down into the far, green country that stretched away, fold on fold, to meet the sky. And now Dikar was glad that he was Boss of the Bunch, so that he would lead them—

But after this morning he might be no longer Boss!

Dikar remembered that he must fight Tomball over who should be Boss, and he remembered what Tomball had done and what Tomball had said last night, between dream and dream. Dikar threw off his blanket and leaped from his cot, and all down the length of the Boys' House bronzed forms leaped from the cots, and curtains were raised, and the sun streamed in.

But the Boys did not laugh in the sun, and they did not laugh and play jokes on one another as they ran, behind Dikar, out through the door in the wall away from the Girls' House, and through the woods to where a stream leaped from a ledge overhead into a pool below, and ran brawling out of the pool as if eager to reach the edge of the Drop and leap again over it, and smash itself on the tumbled rocks below.

The Boys did not shout as they sprang after Dikar into the icy pool, and none swam near him, and none joined him when he climbed on the stone where the stream came down, and stood there, letting the stream batter him.

But when tingling with the cold of the waters, with the lash of the spray, Dikar ran back through the woods to the Boys' House, little Jimlane came up to run beside him.

"Dikar," Jimlane panted. "Oh, Dikar. They're sayin' Tomball is sure to beat you. They're sayin' he's too strong for you. An' a lot are sayin' it's a good thing, that they're tired of you being Boss, and that when Tomball is Boss we won't have to work all the time, an' we'll have more time for Games, an' for—an' for playin' with the Girls."

Dikar ran along, and from his lithe limbs the drops spattered, shining in the sun, and under his yellow beard his jaw-muscles hardened, but he did not speak.

"An' Tomball says he's goin' to fix me when he's Boss," Jimlane whimpered. "An' I'm afraid, Dikar. I'm awful afraid."

Dikar looked down at the little fellow, and he saw the frightened eyes in the pimply face, and the gray, quivering lips.

"Don't worry, kid," he grunted. "Tomball won't win." But Dikar wasn't sure.

SOMEHOW brekfes was over, and the Bunch was gathered in a circle in the space between the Houses, the Girls on one side and the Boys on the other, and Marilee sat in the Boss's Seat beneath the giant oak, her brown hair still unbraided, mantling her, her small face color-drained. Dikar stood before her, and Tomball stood by his side, and Marilee was speaking.

"You fight," Marilee's clear, sweet voice said, "over who shall be Boss of the Bunch, an the Bunch will obey as Boss the one who wins. You fight with bare fists, an' you fight fair. You begin when I say the word, you end when one is beaten." Her brown eyes were on Dikar's, and her eyes told Dikar that he must not be beaten. "That is all."

Dikar turned away and walked toward one end of the cleared space about which the Bunch stood murmuring. The grass was cool under his bare feet, and springy.

Marilee had ordered it carefully raked, so that there would be no branches to trip the fighters, and no small stones to bruise them if they fell. Many twigs and leaves and small stones had been raked out of the grass, and so calm was Dikar that he even noted how the stones had been put in a great circle to mark the bounds of the space in which he must fight, and how just beyond the circle the Boys and Girls stood tight-packed.

Dikar came to the end of the space, and turned, and across the space he saw Tomball turning. Fredalton was whispering something in Tomball's ear, and Tomball nodded, grinning with his thick lips.

"Fight!" Marilee cried out.

Dikar started going back toward Tomball, and Tomball came to meet him, half-crouched, his black-stubbed countenance scowling fiercely, great pads of muscle across his shaggy chest, his hairy belly indrawn.

Dikar moved lithely across the raked grass, his beard shining yellow in the sunlight, his limbs dusted with yellow hair

All at once Tomball was very close, and Tomball's fist struck Dikar's cheek, and Dikar's cheek knotted with the pain of the blow, and his head rocked.

But Dikar's arm jarred with the blow he had landed on Tomball's chest, and then Dikar no longer felt any pain. He stood breast to breast with his enemy, his fisted arms were clubs that pounded the dark face and the hairy body he hated. There was a salt taste in his mouth that was very pleasant, and there was joy in the blows he gave, and joy even in the blows he received.

He made no effort to guard himself from Tomball's blows, nor did Tomball try to guard himself from Dikar's. They fought like the beasts fight, eager only to hurt, eager only to pound the other to submission.

And over them washed the shouts and the screams of the Bunch.

INTO a red haze that was all that was left of his vision, Dikar flung arms so heavy he barely could lift them. Somewhere in the haze was a darker bulk that moved about, and it was at this Dikar flung his arms. Sometimes Dikar found it, more often not, and when he missed the weight of his arms pulled him off balance, and he would start to fall, and somehow not fall.

Sometimes Dikar would be struck, out of the haze, and he would sway on his legs that had no strength in them, and almost go down; but he did not let himself because he must not, though he no longer knew why.

And out of the haze came an endless thunder of shouting.

Dikar pawed once again at the vague bulk that was his enemy, and missed, and swayed, and in that instant the bulk struck him, and Dikar's legs folded, and he sank. His sight cleared, and lurching at him came Tomball's red-bathed body, Tomball's distorted face. Somehow Dikar threw a heavy arm at Tomball and struck him, so that as Dikar settled to the ground Tomball staggered back.

Tomball did not fall, but was steady-ing. Dikar, sprawled on the grass, knew that when Tomball had steadied he would come in again to finish Dikar, and Dikar did not care—

"Dikar!" he heard a high, clear voice above the endless roar. "No!" *Marilee!* "No, Dikar. No!" and suddenly Dikar cared desperately that Tomball was beating him, and his fallen body trembled as he tried to get up, but he had no strength—

"Oh up, Dikar," a voice squeaked, and Jimlane's pimpled face swam over Dikar, close to Dikar's face, and Jimlane's hand was tugging at Dikar's hand to pull him up. "You can lick him now, Dikar." Dikar came up with the pull of Jimlane's hand, Jimlane's fingers closing Dikar's hand into a fist. And Tomball, grinning through the red that masked him, lurched in to beat Dikar down again.

Dikar lifted a heavy arm and flung it at Tomball, and Dikar's fist fell on Tomball's brow. Tomball crumpled and lay, a still heap on the grass, with Dikar swaying above him, arms hanging by his sides, in his ears a deafening roar.

And out of the roar came Marilee, her cheeks rosy, her eyes alight. "Oh, Dikar."

That was all she said, but Dikar straightened, feeling the strength flow back into him, hearing the hurrahs of the Bunch clear in his ears, knowing the hurrahs were for him.

Marilee took hold of Dikar's wrist to lift his arm and cry him the winner.

The color fled from her cheeks and from her lips, and the light went from her eyes as they fell to Dikar's still-fisted hand.

Dikar's eyes went down to where Marilee's eyes looked, and they saw what Marilee's eyes saw. In his fist that had pounded Tomball down was clenched a stone, and there was blood on the stone, Tomball's blood.

Dikar knew now why Jimlane had closed that hand into a fist, why Jimlane, tugging him up, had said, "You can lick him now." Jimlane had—

"Dikar," Marilee sobbed. "Oh, Dikar,"

and then Marilee was lifting Dikar's arm so that all might see what was in Dikar's fist, and the hurrahs stopped, and there was a throbbing hush.

Marilee's voice was loud and clear in that terrible hush. "I cry Dikar no fair. I cry Tomball the winner of the fight. I cry Tomball Boss of the Bunch."

Marilee threw Dikar's arm from her, and it was as if she threw Dikar from her, and she turned away. Dikar thought he heard Marilee sob, but she walked away from him head high, back proud. Dikar's mouth moved but no words came out of it, and he knew there was no use of his saying that he had not known the stone was in his fist.

A strange, low sound came from the throats of the Bunch, and it grew louder. A stone struck Dikar on the shoulder, and another, and Dikar saw that all the Bunch was bending to pick up stones, lifting them to throw them at him.

"Run!" Jimlane screamed. "Run, Dikar," and Dikar turned and ran, the stones falling about him; ran, staggering, straight at the hating faces of the Bunch, and the Bunch opened a path for him, and Dikar ran into the woods, the stones spattering about him.

Dikar ran in the dim woods till he fell, and he crawled till he could crawl no longer, and he lay still in the woods, and a sick nothingness took him.

CHAPTER VII

THE FAR GREEN LAND

DIKAR lived in the woods as the beasts live, and as the beasts' hurts heal so did his. He set snares for the rabbits and the birds that were so plentiful in the woods, and cooked them over his little fires. He found sharp-edged stones, and used them as knives to make a bow for himself, twisting and drying the gut of the rabbit for string, and he made arrows, feathering them, and a quiver out of the bark of a birch.

He hunted with his bow and arrows, and he lay long hours on the mossy floor

of a clearing near the top of the Mountain, watching the little creatures of the forest play, looking sometimes into the great, beautiful eyes of the deer peering out at him from the brush, watching the birds chirp on the tree boughs above him.

It was spring and always the small woods creatures played two by two, and the deer went two by two, and the birds; and seeing this, Dikar would think of Marilee.

Yes, Dikar's hurts healed but the ache within him did not heal.

Sometimes Dikar would climb to the tipmost branch of a tall tree that stood on the very top of the Mountain. He would stay there till dark, gazing at the far green land that stretched, fold on fold, away to where the sky came down to meet it. He would think of what he had dreamed the last night he was Boss, and of his thought that some day he would lead the Bunch down into that pleasant land, and his heart would be heavy within him.

Spring warmed into summer, and summer deepened.

Every night Dikar would slip through the woods till he came to where the trees were black against the red glow of the Fire, and he could crouch behind the trunk of some tree and look out into the space between the Houses. He dared not do this till just before Bed-Time, when he knew most of the Bunch were in the Houses and there was little danger of one coming upon him.

Dikar would hear the drone of their Now-I-lay-mes, and he would kneel and say his own with them. With his palms together and his eyes closed, it was almost as if he knelt by his own cot in the Boys' House, almost as if he were still one of the Bunch.

After his Now-I-lay-me was said, Dikar would stay there, listening to the talk of the Boys or the Girls whose turn it was to tend the Fire.

What Dikar heard made his heart heavy. As he had feared, Tomball was letting the Bunch break Rule after Rule,

was favoring his pals and laying double work on those he did not like, was shirking many of the little things that Dikar knew were needed if the Bunch was to be warm and comfortable and safe when the cold came, and the snow.

One of the Rules Tomball allowed to be broken was the Rule that none must leave his cot after Bed-Time. Dikar would see Girls come out of the Girls' House and slip off into the woods, and he would see Boys do the same. Often they had not yet come back when Dikar tired of watching had gone back to the shelter he had woven for himself out of twigs.

One thing troubled Dikar above all others. He never saw Marilee tending the Fire. That she was never one of those who went into the woods after Bed-Time pleased him, but it was strange that her turn never came to tend the Fire.

ONE night Dikar heard the reason. He heard that, the day he was stoned, Marilee had said that she no longer would be Boss of the Girls, that she had made Bessalton Boss in her place on the promise that she would free Marilee of the duty of tending to the Fire, or of any other duty that would take her away from the other Girls. And that this was because Tomball wanted Marilee to go into the woods with him, and Marilee feared him.

Dikar's throat grew thick when he heard this. Growling, he rose from his haunches to stride out into the light of the Fire and call out Tomball to fight him, not with fists, but with bows and arrows, and knives, in a fight to the death. His rage blinding him, Dikar was caught in a bush he did not see, and before he could get free he heard something else from the tongue of Jimlane, who was tending the Fire with Billthomas and had spoken of Marilee and Tomball.

"If Dikar was Boss again, things would be different, but there's no chance of that, because the minute he shows up the Bunch will stone him again, the way Tomball was ordered, and he would not get away again."

Dikar went cold, remembering the way the stones had spattered about him, and was very still in the bush.

"The Bunch wouldn't stone Dikar," Billthomas said, very low and looking about with frightened eyes, "if you spoke out. Tomball's orders or no, they would not stone Dikar if they knew that it wasn't Dikar's fault he fought no fair."

"I dare not tell them." Jimlane's eyes went big in his white face. "You remember how I told you, an how you said yourself the Bunch would stone me if I told."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I couldn't rest, an I went to Tomball an told him, an Tomball beat me till I could hardly walk. That was the time I said I fell into a hole in the woods, you remember. An after Tomball beat me, he told me that if I said a word to anyone else he would kill me, an he would kill anyone I told."

"He did!" Now there was fear in Billthomas's eyes, too, and in his face. "You should not have told me, Jimlane— If Tomball finds out I know." His voice was still low, but there was a scream in it—

"If only," Jimlane sobbed, "Dikar could some way come back and protect me while I told the Bunch—"

"What's the use of all the ifs?" Billthomas broke in. "Tomball's made sure Dikar would be killed before you had a chance to say anythin. The best thing we can do is forget about Dikar, like everyone else has."

"Yes," Jimlane whispered. "I guess so. Dikar isn't one of the Bunch any more, an he will never be again."

"Never again," Billthomas agreed.

Now indeed Dikar, rigid in the dark, knew that he was disowned by his kind. He must live out his life alone, a wild beast in the woods—

And then, perhaps from some unseen Presence in the close-crowding dark, perhaps from within Dikar, a thought came to him. He was no longer one of the Bunch, and so he was not bound by the Rules of the Bunch. He was not bound

by the Must-Nots that the Bunch must obey. There was something for him to do, and no Rule to say that he must not.

He drifted off into the darkness, silent as a shadow. But there was no sleep for Diker that night.

ALL that night, and all the next day, Diker was busy, cutting down long vines from the trees, testing each one for strength. He plaited the vines, never stopping, never resting, till by nightfall he had made a rope long enough for his need.

When dark came Diker hung his quiver of arrows over one shoulder, and he hung the great coil of green rope over the other shoulder, and he followed the sound of a stream through the black forest till he came to where the woods ended and there was a little space between the edge of the woods and the edge of the Drop, where the stream leaped out into the night.

Here Diker paused, and laid the rope down, and passed its end around the great trunk of a tree that grew beside the stream, and fastened the rope with many knots, and pulled on it with all his strength to make certain that the knots would hold.

Diker bent, then, and lifted the coil of rope that he had made from the vines, and carried it to the edge of the Drop, and let it fall into the dark.

At his feet the rope tautened, and quivered, and below him there was the sound of its unwinding coil thumping against the high, sheer rock of the Drop, and the sound of the stream's waters, falling down and down into sightless blackness. And then the rope at Diker's feet was no longer quivering, so that he knew the coil was all unwound.

Diker bent again, and lifted the rope, and moved it over so that it lay in the water where the stream leaped out over the Drop, so that when the sun rose again, all the length of the rope that hung down the Drop would be hidden behind the falling waters.

Then, without pause, Diker had hold of the rope with his hands, and he was over the edge of the Drop, and the icy waters

were rushing about him, were battering him, were fighting to break loose his hold and send him hurtling down into the dizzy dark to smash on the rocks below.

Diker could not see and he could not breathe, and his hands were slipping on the wet rope. He caught a leg around the rope, and slid. He could breathe again because he hung between the rushing waters and the rocky face of the Drop.

Diker went down and down, endlessly, down into the black and dizzy darkness, down to where the great stones lay tumbled, and the waters raged between them, and the Old Ones slept.

THE sun was high in the sky, but Diker was concealed in the leafy shadow of a treetop where he lay outstretched along a thick bough. He was peering at a sight that made of his skin an icy, prickling sheath for his body.

The tree was at the other end of the woods through which Diker had loped after finally crossing the belt of immense stones that lay about the Mountain where the Bunch lived. Some time in the night, sounds ahead, and moving lights had alarmed him, and he had climbed the tree to wait for what the day would show him.

Diker, as comfortable there as on his mossy bed in the Mountain forest, had slept longer than he intended. Into his feet had come the sound of marching feet, and he had thought himself back in his dream of the night before his fight with Tomball. But his eyes had opened and the marching feet had still sounded in his ears, and then Diker had seen those whose feet made the sound.

The tree in which Diker wakened was at the edge of the woods and the edge of a great, flat field. Not far from the tree wires stretched, one above the other, twice Diker's height. Fastened to thin poles, the wires ran away on either hand as far as Diker could see, and the wires were thick with long, sharp thorns that would tear a Boy's flesh to bits.

Beyond this set of wires was another

set just like them, as high and as wickedly barbed, and between the two sets of wires stood, far apart, figures out of Dikar's dream.

They were dressed in green like the men in the dream who had run across the fields that now were covered with great stones, shooting at the Old Ones. Like those, their faces and their hands were black, and like those they carried the shiny sticks that Dikar now remembered were called "guns."

But the sound of marching feet came from inside the second fence. A great crowd of people were marching out of some long, low houses that were very much like the Bunch's Houses. Just as Dikar spied them, they stopped marching and stood in a long, straight line in front of the houses.

They were pretty far away, but Dikar could see them, and he could see that they were very thin, and they were dressed in ragged clothes that hung loose on them. He could see that their faces were white, and that their eyes were sunk deep in their heads, and that they were all stooped over as if they were very tired, although it was only early morning.

A voice yelled something, and the white people turned, so that the lines faced Dikar. Dikar saw that the one who had yelled was different. His face was yellow, and he was dressed in green, but there was something different about his green clothes, and he had no gun.

There were other men in green standing around in there. Some of them were black-faced, and some yellow-faced, some had guns and others didn't. One very big one only had green on below his waist, above that he had nothing on. His body was as yellow as his face, and his muscles were bigger than Dikar's muscles, or even Tom-ball's. He was holding something in one hand. It was long and thin and black. His other hand was against a thick post beside which he stood.

The man in the different green clothes yelled something again, and then Dikar saw two black-faced ones come out of a

smaller house to one side, and between them was a white one who was so weak they had to almost carry him. They came to the thick post, and they shoved the white man up against the post with his face to it, and they tied his arms and his legs around it, and then they tore off his clothes above the waist, and stepped away.

The yellow-faced man yelled a lot to the white people. Dikar could hear him, but he couldn't make out what he was saying. When he finished he made a sign with his hand to the big yellow man.

That one lifted the long, thin thing he held, and it looked like a snake. And he lifted it above his head and it straightened out, and then it came down across the back of the white man who was tied to the post. Dikar heard the crack it made, and he saw the red mark across the white man's back.

And the yellow man lifted the thin, snakelike thing again, and brought it down again, and there was another crack, and another red mark across the white man's back.

Dikar was sick, seeing that. And then he wasn't sick. He was mad. He wanted to yell out, "Stop!" but he remembered his dream now, remembered what the guns could do, and he knew that if he yelled the men between the wires would see him and shoot him down.

Crack, Dikar heard, and *crack* again, and now the back of the man tied to the post was all red, all shining red. But Dikar was on his feet, on the tree branch. He was pulling taut the string of his bow, and an arrow was laid across it.

The big yellow lifted his arm again, but when it fell there was no crack. The big yellow was falling, and the feathers of an arrow were sticking out of his back. Just the feathers.

Dikar didn't see any more, because he was swinging through the treetops, a brown and naked Boy flashing through the tops of the trees, fleeing the death from the guns that he recalled were swifter and farther reaching than any arrow.

Whether the men in green ever thought to look for him in the treetops Dikar never knew.

FAR away from the place of the thorny wires, Dikar lay on his belly in the tall grass that covered a hill, and he looked down through the grass at a place where two roads crossed.

There stood a pole, high as a tall tree, but there was no bark on it, no branches nor leaves, and because at its top five or six cross-sticks were fastened, and a lot of wires ran from these cross-pieces to other cross-sticks at the top of another pole far away down one of the roads.

Dikar was looking at a rope that hung taut from one of the cross-sticks at the top of the pole. Dikar was looking at that which weighed down the rope and kept it taut.

The thing swung back and forth, back and forth, very slowly in the wind, and rags fluttered about it in the wind, and the rags were no grayer nor dirtier than the thing was. And Dikar saw that the thing once had been a man.

. . . Dikar came to a place where there was a House all of rock, and it was three or four times as high as the Boys' House, and ten times as long. The window openings in the wall of this House were very high and very wide.

Dikar saw a lot of people in there, and there were white men and women. These were thin and gray and sunken-eyed as those in the place with the wires, and they were pushing around things piled high with heavy loads, and they were so weak they could push the things only slowly. And there were men in green standing around, and these had little guns hanging at their waists, and they held black, snakelike things like the big yellow one held.

And Dikar saw a white woman stumble and fall, and he saw one of the men in green raise the thing he held and bring it down on her, again and again till, all bloody, she pulled herself up on the thing she had been pushing and started pushing it again.

And the other men in green laughed, but the white people just kept on pushing, all stooped over and weak, their eyes like the eyes of the woman in Dikar's dream who stood in the subway station and said that God was dead.

. . . Dikar went far and wide that day, a brown shadow flitting through the fields and the woods, a silent shadow none saw. Dikar saw many things that day, and the more he saw the heavier his heart grew within him. For Dikar knew that the white-faced men and women were his people and that this green land belonged to them and to him, and that the black men and yellow men were they whom the voice in his dream had said, "have come out of the East to make this world a Hell."

Yes, Dikar saw the Hell they had made.

. . . The sky darkened and the night crept out of the woods, and Dikar lay belly down in tall grass of a field near the woods, head buried in his curled arm, thinking. Last night he had known that he would never return to the Mountain where the Bunch lived, and now he knew that he could not stay in this land that had seemed so pleasant when he had gazed at it from his tall tree in the forest.

Neither there nor here was there place for Dikar. Nowhere was there place for him—

Fingers clutched Dikar's arm, bruising fingers. Dikar rolled over but the fingers held, and there was a growl of words Dikar could not understand, and in the sunless dusk Dikar saw green-clothed legs, and a green-clothed breast, and a black, fierce face goggling at him.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE TOMORROW

DIKAR kicked at the black man's legs, and he saw the black man's hand dart to the little gun at his waist. Dikar kicked again, wrenched loose, exploded from the ground.

Dikar's one hand caught the little gun, his other smashed into the black, goggling

face. Somehow the black man was on the ground and Dikar was atop him, and Dikar was clutching the black throat with one hand while the other was smashing the little gun down on the black man's head, smashing and smashing and smashing.

When Dikar fled into the night-shrouded woods he left behind him something that had legs and a body and arms, but nothing that was anything like a head.

Deep in the woods, Dikar found a little cave. He crawled into this and lay there a long time, shuddering. But after awhile he stirred, and he became aware that he still held in his hands the little gun, and he sat up, his eyes widening with a sudden thought.

Dikar hid the little gun under a pile of rotting leaves, and he went out of the cave and prowled about till he was certain that no one was anywhere within sound of hearing. Then he went back into the cave with certain things he had picked up and he made a fire, and by the light of the fire Dikar studied the little gun until he had made out how it worked.

Satisfied at last, Dikar put out his fire and buried it with wet earth, and left the cave. That night Dikar traveled far and fast, but careful to leave no tracks by which he might be traced.

Dikar was going back to the Mountain, and he must not leave any trail the men in green might follow.

ONE more night Dikar stole down through the dark forest to the Houses of the Bunch, but this night it was long after Bed-Time that he did so. This night Dikar did not crouch behind a tree, looking out at the Fire, but crept, noiselessly, along the wall of the Boys' House that was away from the Fire till, under a certain window opening, he came to a stop.

Dikar listened, trembling a bit, and all he could hear was the whisper of wind in the trees, and the shrill of insects in the night, and the soft breathing of the sleeping Boys. Dikar lifted, slowly, slowly, till he stood upright. The ground here was

banked against the wall so that, standing, Dikar's belly was level with the bottom of the window.

Slowly, he ran his hand over the sill, and touched the curtain of woven withes and moved it aside. And then he was peering through, and a fleck of red light was dancing on a sleeping face, and the face was rashed with pimples.

Dikar breathed again. He had remembered right. This was Jimlane.

Dikar got his other hand through the window, and then it was tight over Jimlane's mouth, and Jimlane's scared eyes were staring up at Dikar.

"Listen," Dikar breathed. "Listen to me, Jimlane." Dikar spoke so low that barely he could hear himself, but by the look in Jimlane's eyes he knew that Jimlane heard him and understood.

After awhile Dikar stole away, and for the first time since Tomball had challenged him, Dikar was smiling.

THERE was green all about Dikar, the dancing, leafy green of the top of the giant oak in which he had spent the rest of that night. He was still smiling when he awoke, but peering through the leaves at the Bunch where they chattered, cleaning up after Brekfes, there was a flutter of some small muscle in the tautness of his belly.

Across the space between the House Dikar spied Marilee talking with Bessalton. Dikar saw how thin Marilee had grown, and how wan her little face, and how her fingers plucked endlessly at her short skirt of plaited grasses, and Dikar's smile faded.

Tomball strode up to the two Girls, black-stubbled as ever. His belly was overlaid with fat, but it was still shaggy with hair, and Tomball's grin was still leering.

Tomball put a hand on Marilee's arm, and Marilee shrank away from him. Under Dikar's yellow beard little muscles knotted to ridge his jaw, and there was a growl in his throat.

Tomball laughed, and then from behind the Boys' House came the loud words of

a scrap. "He's mine!" Jimlane's voice piped, and "I say he's mine," squealed the thin voice of Billthomas, and around the corner of the Boys' House the two came, and between them was a half-grown fawn, with a vine wound around its brown neck and trailing, broken, from it.

Jimlane had hold of the fawn's head and Billthomas of its hind legs, and each tugged as if to take it from the other.

"It was caught in my snare," Billthomas piped.

"You lie," Jimlane squealed.

And then Billthomas straightened and cried out. "It's you who lie, Jimlane. I dare you to fight out with me, bare fists, whose snare he was caught in, and whose he shall be."

Tomball's deep-chested laugh came to Dikar's ears, but Jimlane's voice, breaking from squeal to bass and back again to squeal, was answering Billthomas. "You dare me fight whose the fawn shall be?" it said. "Do you cry a fight between us fair?"

And Billthomas: "I cry us equal-matched," and all about were cries of "Fair. Fair. They're equal-matched!" and the Boys and Girls of the Bunch were running from all over, and crying, "Fight! Let them fight!"

And then the Bunch was crowded in a great circle, and the fawn was tied by the vine about its neck to the Boss's Seat, and Tomball, grinning, was seated in the Boss's Seat, just beneath the oak, and Bessalton was seated beside him, mantled in her black hair, and Jimlane and Billthomas stood before them while Tomball spoke to them.

But Dikar's look was on Marilee where she stood in the crowd, her two long brown braids coming down over her shoulders, her deepening breasts beneath leafy circlets.

Dikar's eyes drank thirstily of Marilee till Tomball was finished speaking and Jimlane and Billthomas were walking slowly, each to their end of the cleared space where they were to fight. Jimlane reached the end of the circle, turned—

The little gun jumped in Dikar's hand, and the fawn, just beneath him dropped, wet-redness streaking the brown neck.

A Girl screamed, high and shrill, and then Dikar was shouting: "Stay where you are or I'll kill each of you as I've killed the fawn. I'll kill the first one that moves."

"Dikar!" Marilee cried, and then she was silent, and all were silent and unmoving, the Boys and the Girls in their jammed circle, Tomball in the Boss's Seat.

"Jimlane," Dikar shouted down into that hush, "tell the Bunch how the stone came into my hand with which I struck Tomball when we fought who should be Boss."

Jimlane, white of face and big of eye, but standing straight, cried out. "I put the stone in Dikar's hand, when he fell at my feet."

"Did I know you put the stone in my hand?" Dikar shouted from the tree.

"You did not know, Dikar. You were blinded with your own blood, an numbed with Tomball's blows, an you did not know there was a stone in your hand."

A MURMURING ran around the circle, and a growl, and Dikar saw that the Bunch did not quite believe that he had not known he was striking Tomball with a stone, though they had agreed to fight bare fist.

"Jimlane," Dikar shouted. "Have you ever told this thing to anyone?"

"I told it to Tomball," Jimlane cried, "and Tomball beat me for saying that you did not know you fought no fair, an Tomball said that if I spoke to anyone else he would kill me, an kill the one to whom I spoke of it."

"You lie!" Tomball shouted, starting from seat. "You lie, dummy!" Jimlane screamed with terror of Tomball, but Dikar's shout beat down Jimlane's scream.

"Back!" Dikar shouted. "Back to your seat, Tomball, or you die." And Tomball went pasty white under his black stubble, and he slumped down in his seat.

And Dikar leaped out from the oak bough on which he stood, and came down,

spring-legged, in the clear space around which the Bunch was jammed, and held aloft the little gun.

"This is the thing that kills," he shouted. "Without it I cannot kill," and then he flung the little gun from him, flung it hard so that it went up on the roof of the Boys' House and stayed there.

"Now I cannot kill," Dikar shouted. "No more than any of you."

"Stone him," Tomball yelled. "Stone him, Bunch. He is none of us and we will have none of him." And Dikar saw the Bunch stoop to pluck up stones. Spraddle-legged, bronze-skinned in the sun, he saw this, and his heart within him died, but he would not move.

"No!" It was a high, wild cry in his ear, and it came from Marilee, and Mariless was beside Dikar. "I cry no fair. I cry the Bunch no fair, all of you against this one."

"He fought no fair," Tomball shouted, "an so has no right to call for fairness. Stand aside, Marilee, and let the Bunch stone him."

"I will not stand aside," Marilee answered. "Be you Boss or not, till you tell the Bunch why you said you would kill Jimlane if he told his tale to anyone, an would kill anyone he told the tale to. If you still thought Dikar had fought no fair, why were you afraid to let the Bunch hear Jimlane's tale and judge for themselves?"

Now Tomball's little eyes seemed to have grown even smaller, and his mouth was drawn very tight.

"She's right," someone yelled. "Why, Tomball, did you not let us judge for ourselves?"

"Jimlane lies," Tomball answered. "He never told me this tale, and I never—"

"It is you who lie," Dikar cut in. "I say you lie, Tomball. I cry you a liar, Tomball, an I dare you to fight me whether you lie or not. I cry that I fought fair, an I dare you to fight me whether I fought fair or not. I dare you to fight me who shall be Boss of the Bunch. I cry us equal-matched, an if you refuse to fight

me I will cry you a liar and yellow an not fit to be Boss of the Bunch an not fit to be one of the Bunch. Will you fight, Tomball, bare fists?"

There was only one answer Tomball could make. "I fight you bare fists, Dikar. I fight you here an now."

AND then they were fighting, were clubbing at each other with fisted arms, lips drawn back from white teeth, eyes hating. But Dikar was gaunt and hard-bitten, and toughened by the life he had led since he'd been stoned from the Bunch, and Tomball was fat and slow, and short-winded, and so the fight did not last long. Dikar beat Tomball down, laid him rolling at his feet, and there was scarcely a mark on Dikar when he stood above his beaten enemy and heard the shouts of the Bunch.

"Hurray for Dikar. Hurray for the Boss. Hurray and hurray and hurray."

Dikar scarcely heard the hurrays. He was peering about for Marilee and he saw her, and he motioned commandingly for her to come to him. She came to him, her white and slender body shining in the sun, her eyes shining more brightly than the sun, and then she was beside Dikar, and Dikar's arm was around her, and he was holding her close to his side.

Under the thunder of the hurrays, Dikar spoke to Marilee. "Marilee," he said. "In the time I have been alone in the woods I have learned many things, an one of the things I have learned is that each creature has his mate, the birds an the small beasts of the woods, an the deer. I learned that He who made all things meant this to be so, an meant that we too, each of us, shall have his mate. Marilee, I want you for my mate."

He was looking down into her face, and now he waited, with a tightness growing in him that was both keen happiness and fear.

Marilee's red lips spoke. "Oh, Dikar. This that you have learned only now, I have known always. Dikar, always I have wanted you for my mate."

A great joy leaped within Dikar, and he raised his hand and roared, "Shut up! Shut up, all of you." And the hurrahs died away, and the Bunch was hushed, and Dikar was talking into that smiling hush.

"There are many things I have to say to you, an many Rules I shall have to change. All this will come later. Just now I have something to say, but not to you, though I wish all the Bunch to hear it, all the Bunch, an Another."

Then, in that hush, Dikar turned to the giant oak, and to the forest beyond the oak, and his voice was low, and slow, and awed.

"You Whose voice is the whisper of the wind in the trees, an the ripple of the water in the streams an the song of the insects in the night! You, who watch over us by day, an by night! You to Whom we say our now-I-lay-mes at Bed-Time! Sir! Look upon me and upon this girl, an hear me. In your sight an your hearin I take this Girl to be my mate, an none other than this Girl, an to You an to her I promise that all my life I will take care of her an let no harm come near her. I promise that all my life she shall be bone of my bone an flesh of my flesh, all my life an all her life, an always an always."

"Hear me, Sir!" Marilee's clear, young voice rang out. "I shall be this Boy's mate, an none other's, an he shall be bone of my bone, an flesh of my flesh, always an always."

And it seemed to Dikar that a soft hand stroked his hair, though it might have been the wind. How could it be the wind, though, that said in his ear, in sweet, low tones, "The Lord bless you, my son, an the Lord bless my daughter."

Dikar had climbed to the tipmost branch of the tallest tree in the forest, and Marilee had climbed there with him. For a long time, clasped in each other's arms, they had gazed out on the green land that stretched, fold on fold, to the sky, while Dikar told Marilee of his dream that was not a dream, and of the terrible things he had seen down there.

"Some day, Marilee," Dikar ended. "I shall lead the Bunch down there. I have to, because down there is the America of which the man spoke, an this is the Tomorrow he talked about, an we are the children of yesterday who will reconquer those green and pleasant fields for democracy, and liberty, and freedom."

And all at once there was a light shining on the land down there, a great and golden light that cast no shadows.

There will be a further account of Dikar and the Bunch, of how they went down to the world below their Mountain.

The Man in the Moon

by Homer Eon Flint

CHAPTER I.

LADIES FIRST.

IT is only fair to say, right now, that Catherine accepted Mr. Brett with a distinct condition. She was to be merely a companion to him in his last days. He cheerfully agreed to the arrangement, knowing better than to expect anything more. At the time, he was just four times her age.

"But it's worth it, my dear, just to have you to look at," he often assured her; and he meant it. He made her his sole heir.

So, as might be expected, Catherine soon turned her attention to making use of the million he had left her. She found, of course, that the particular strata of society for which she longed rather frowned down upon her. She had been the millionaire's stenographer previous to their marriage.

Whereupon she deliberately set to work to win a man of her own age; a man already within the charmed circle. She had brains as well as youth and beauty, and she proposed to spare neither.

She went about it very energetically, taking prominent parts in several social-welfare enterprises, thereby coming in contact with the people she sought to know. But she failed to make a hit with the younger men. Had she been as well informed in athletics or politics as she was in business, she would have done infinitely better. And as soon as she realized this, she proceeded to have a good cry, changed her mind entirely, and began to look over the field of confirmed bachelors.

It was about this time that John Bates, of Bates & Foster, Constructing Engineers, decided to run for Governor. Immediately his opponents searched for facts with which to discredit him; and that is the reason why Philip Foster, his partner, was thrust into the public eye and before Catherine Brett's notice.

Philip had been the silent, and incidentally the thinking, partner of the firm, it seemed. His contact with the world had been almost entirely through Bates. Now, people learned that Philip was really the brains of the pair.

Of course, it was the San Francisco-to-Chicago Tunnel which put Bates & Foster on the world map. Before that, they had done everything in the engineering line, from installing the new Pacific Coast wave-motor system to building the Detroit airplane-starter tower. They had nothing to do with such propositions as the San Francisco Bay Bridge; they specialized on difficult work which other concerns were afraid to handle.

That is where Philip Foster's brains came in. Quiet, retiring sort of chap though he was, he had a most astonishing imagination, coupled with a truly remorseless logic. He could devise ways and means where all other experts failed.

Not to go into details; but who except Philip Foster would have had the nerve to adapt the screw-tube principle to so huge a project as the tunnel? Yet, to-day, when folks on the Pacific Coast receive a shipment of freight which left Chicago just

twenty-four hours ago, we may possibly think of Bates & Foster, and that will remind us of Bates; but never of Foster.

The Bates & Foster suite occupied the entire ninth floor of the Ballou Building on Market Street, not far from the ferry. Altogether, it amounted to nearly thirty rooms, fully a third of which were given over to laboratories; for Philip often had a score of experiments, chemical, electrical or physical, under way at one time. As for the other rooms, most of them were occupied by the small regiment of draftsmen the firm required, while the partners had each a private office, opening off a single reception-room. The knob on Bates's door was worn smooth; Philip's still looked new. The one was opened fifty times to the others once.

Catherine found these details immensely interesting. She learned that Philip could claim membership in the coveted set; and she quickly made up her mind that this hitherto unsought, because unknown, bachelor must be won if she was to prove that she was "qualified."

She did not believe that true love was blind. On the contrary, Catherine was firmly convinced that the only genuine love is that which develops between those who have shown mutual fitness. She believed in love after a year or two of married life, during which both parties had proved that they were worthy. According to her theory, she couldn't possibly have fallen in love with Mr. Brett; it was out of the question for her to prove herself worthy of a man old enough to be her grandfather.

So her apparently cold-blooded designs upon Philip Foster were not so cold-blooded, after all. Catherine fully expected that the affair would become quite ardent enough in due time.

She learned that Philip rarely left his club, appearing in society only when his aunt gave some sort of an affair for a certain orphanage. By means of the most intricate maneuverings, which need not be gone into here, Catherine contrived to attend these affairs, succeeded in getting an introduction, and even managed to hold Philip's attention.

She did it by talking business. It re-

lieved him immensely to get away from the small-talk people; he had never mastered the art of saying much about nothing while seeming to mean it all; and even though Catherine's stock exchange chatter was quite out of his line, it was infinitely preferable to the other kind of embarrassment.

He studied her carelessly. She was between twenty-five and thirty, slightly stooped-shouldered from her early life in Mr. Brett's office, and singularly languid in her movements. This, however, was rather deceptive; in actual fact Catherine Brett covered a great deal of ground in the apparently lackadaisical fashion of hers, whether she were walking or talking. She made every move, every word, count heavily.

Also, she was really beautiful, in a somber, wistful sort of a way. A closer look at her dark brown eyes might have revealed a very slight tightening at the outer ends of the lids. And the deep indentations at the corners of her mouth argued a strength in reserve that one might mistake for secretiveness. Her nose was very slightly arched, thin, and yet not prominent, probably because her chin was straight and sharply pointed. There was a single deep line between her eyes.

Now, Philip Foster was no Adonis. Of medium height and chunkily built, he showed many signs of too much indoor life. His face was pink as a baby's, his hands as soft. In fact, he was dangerously close to being plain, out-and-out *fat*; and for the past fifteen of his thirty-five years he had assiduously watched the scales, keeping within a five-pound margin which he felt he must never exceed.

His whole manner was exceedingly gentle and diffident. "As modest and bashful as a young girl," the newspapers had said; and Catherine found it quite true.

He had large, blue, timid and unassertive eyes, tucked away beneath a bulging forehead. His nose was really large; likewise his mouth. Why use more delicate terms? The only thing about his face which ever worried him was its lack of a healthy tan. He wasn't bad looking at all, Catherine decided.

Catherine also knew, from the newspapers, that "the other half of Philip Fos-

ter is his office." It was an extraordinarily complete thing, it seems, containing every conceivable publication on every branch of engineering. The man was a human index to all known data about the profession. Principles he knew by heart, while he kept facts and figures at his fingers' ends. In his office he was invincible; away from it—Catherine would see.

They had not met many times before he began to prefer her company. She had the tact not to compliment him in any way upon his success; had she done so, he would have been acutely miserable. And all this explains why, since neither of them cared to dance, they often wandered into his aunt's conservatory.

On the night things began to happen, it was full moon. Philip himself picked out a seat in the most secluded spot in the place. He expected to just sit and listen to her talk, as usual, saying "Yes?" and "Of course" now and then, meanwhile thinking of something really important. He took the place beside her quite without noticing that they had to sit pretty close together in order to fit the seat.

Said Catherine Brett to Philip Foster:

"Isn't the moon beautiful to-night?"

CHAPTER II.

AS FOR THE MOON.

PHILIP stirred uncertainly, and cleared his throat. "Very handsome moon, beyond a doubt. Although," he could not help but add, "there's one of Jupiter's moons which I happen to admire a good deal more."

Catherine noted that his eyes were now fixed upon the big yellow disk with which we are all so familiar. Summer time—conservatory—moon; at least three conditions for romance were fulfilled. Catherine lowered her voice:

"What a soft light it is now! Once I saw it from Lick Observatory, and then it had a cold, hard look I didn't like." She shivered almost pitifully.

"It is due to our atmosphere," declared the engineer, thinking only of the softness of the moonlight, not of Catherine's chilli-

ness. "Up at the observatory, the air is much clearer than here."

"Don't you think it has something to do with the warmth of the season?" suggested the woman, softly.

"Only in this sense," he answered, "that there's more dust in the air during the dry months."

She let silence prevail for a little while; then, shyly: "It always makes me feel confidential, somehow, to watch the full moon this way."

He looked at her blankly. "Confidential?"

"Yes"—moving a tiny bit closer to the man. "The moon seems so big and—near! I feel as though I could reach up and whisper secrets in her ear!"

The scientist gave a dry chuckle. "You'd have to reach about a quarter of a million miles, then," said he, adding regretfully: "I haven't the exact figures with me just now."

"But—she looks so big!" protested Catherine, provokingly.

"Very deceiving," said Philip, referring only to the apparent size of the satellite, not to Catherine's manner. "She's less than half the diameter of the earth, so that her actual area is only about one fifth." He added that he would look the matter up the next day, and mail her the data in more precise terms.

She sighed, in a manner which would have opened most men's eyes. "You scientific people are always trying to see the mathematical side of things," she complained, prettily, in a fashion calculated to bring contrition at once. "Isn't there something about the mellowness of that light which—well, which stirs thoughts other than—other than everyday thoughts?"

He longed for a telescope. "Looks normal enough to me," he admitted, sorry he could not see what she saw; he never liked to disagree with people. "As for her light—it isn't hers at all, of course."

Catherine pretended ignorance. "Whose light is it, then?"

"The sun's, reflected," said the scientist. "That's why it doesn't amount to much. Why, it would take half a million such

moons to equal the sunlight. At least, something very close to that figure," he added, uncomfortably.

Catherine sighed again, and Philip realized that he had not said the right thing. He was used to that feeling, however, and simply waited for the next test of his painfully limited conversational powers.

Catherine had a notion to change the subject entirely, then thought better of it. "I wonder why poets often rave about the 'cold beauty of the moon'?" she mused. "There's nothing cold about her appearance now." She settled herself more comfortably in the narrow settee, so that Philip was made freshly aware of her nearness.

"Nor is she cold," he declared. "The moon is always a pretty warm place wherever the sun shines on her. No wonder; her day is fourteen times as long as ours." He reminded Catherine that the moon always kept the same face toward the earth, and added that this peculiarity was due to the great gravitational pull of the bigger globe.

Catherine opened her eyes wide, then closed them swiftly as she saw her chance. "She has nights fourteen days long? What a pity she has no moon!"

"Oh, but she has," returned the agreeable man of science. "The earth is the moon's moon, Mrs. Brett, and a mighty efficient one. Four or five times as big, you know."

"Then," she went on, with studied artlessness, "it would be perfectly grand to sit in a conservatory like this, somewhere on the moon. Just think of a night as long as that, and watching the moon with— with—" She stopped, as though in great embarrassment.

Philip looked at her in perplexity. Not once did it occur to him that anybody could desire his company any longer than half an hour. He thought of something quite different.

"A conservatory like this on the moon?" he chided gently. "My dear Mrs. Brett, there can be no plant life of any kind there. No air or water; besides, the temperature drops down to the absolute zero, during the long night." He was on the point of telling her just how cold the nights became,

but could not trust his memory for the figure.

Once more Catherine let silence have its way for a while, and Philip had just about brought his mind back to the electrical problem he had been trying to solve when she broke in with:

"Just the same, I think the moon has a wonderful influence. I know I simply cannot watch her without feeling—oh, different! "I want to do unconventional things!" she finished daringly.

"Eh?" The engineer's mind collected what she had said. "Oh, I don't see why you should be so affected, Mrs. Brett. This astrological nonsense has no basis in fact. The only influence the moon has upon the earth is in causing our tides."

"Tied?" wondered Catherine, as though shocked. But Philip did not sense the pun. He gave a short and, to him, woefully inaccurate explanation of the tidal action.

This time Catherine did not let so much time elapse. "I wonder why the ancients used to call the moon 'luna'?" she murmured pensively.

"Why, I can't say," he said regretfully. "'Luna'—Latin word, I suppose." He frowned. "Maybe it's from the same root as 'lunatic.' Guess it is."

She clapped her hands lightly. "And yet you say that the moon can have no effect upon us!" she laughed delightedly, tantalizingly. "Although the ancients must have considered that the moon was to blame for everything foolish that happened!"

He pondered this seriously, so seriously that Catherine said, as lightly as she could: "Hasn't the moon ever inspired you to recklessness, Mr. Foster?"

Instantly his face lighted up. "Oh, my, yes! I've had any number of ideas about the moon. For instance—" He stopped, remembering that he was not talking to Bates. But Catherine, taking care not to appear too eager, urged him to go on.

"Well, this is it: Go to the moon and build a large, air-tight hotel. Nothing like this conservatory; more like an office building. Would have to carry all the water from the earth, but that is only a detail. Oh, yes," answering Catherine's questioning look; "there's more than one way to travel

to the moon. Merely a question of controlling the right kind of power.

"Having the hotel, I'd advertise a novelty such as the world couldn't resist. 'Go to the moon and view the full earth.' Ought to make a hit with some of these wealthy time-killers."

He kept right on, forgetting that the woman at his side was herself one of the despised "time-killers." "But the main attraction would be the difference in gravity." He briefly explained how the moon's smaller mass produced only one-sixth the gravitational force of the earth. "Fancy advertising an indoor Derby: 'Come and see Joe Dillon trot a mile in thirty seconds.' Or, 'Watch Annie Kellerman dive five hundred feet into six feet of water.' All quite feasible, you know, Mrs. Brett.

"I'd charge ten thousand dollars for the trip, including forty-eight hours' accommodations, and get rich in a year!"

Catherine had all she could do to resist his enthusiasm. Instead, she commented: "You must be pretty anxious to get rich!"

He became acutely self-conscious. He made some lame reply, and Catherine Brett came to a conclusion which was not at all unwarranted under the circumstances.

As she rose to her feet, she took his arm and gave it a friendly squeeze, glancing up at him in a knowing way which left him badly puzzled. For this is what she was thinking:

"He wants to get rich so that he can match my million!"

CHAPTER III.

WANTED—A MONUMENT.

AMONG the late Mr. Brett's business associates was one who easily outclassed all the rest. He was a tanner, the leader of the Western world in his line, and the practical dictator of the Pacific hide trade. He became enormously rich during the war, through combining with other tanners to secure hides at rock-bottom prices, on the one hand, and selling the product at utterly unreasonable prices on the other.

So it is not really necessary to tell a

name so well known. David Sulzman is not likely to be forgotten in a hurry.

And Catherine thought of him the very next day after, as she thought, she had divined Philip's ambition. She recalled certain things she had heard Mr. Brett say of the aged tanner, and she lost no time.

As a consequence, David Sulzman came to San Francisco one morning, stepping from the San José train just like some commuter. He was entirely without attendants, which was his invariable custom; and most people would have taken him for some highly respectable but not very successful lawyer of the old school.

For David Sulzman, then in his eighties, was not like other men of great wealth. He never even indulged in an automobile, although such a machine would often have been of the greatest service to him. "Can't afford it," he would say, in his low, pleasant, perfectly steady voice.

But this does not mean that David Sulzman was stingy. Whatever he had was of the best; his thirty-dollar shoes were made especially to fit a pair of oddly shaped feet; he wore nothing but the finest of black broadcloth.

Yet his shoes were repaired with the utmost care, as long as they would hold together; his broadcloth was worn until it shone as brightly as his shoes. He did not believe in using anything cheap, but neither did he spend five cents without getting full value. As to his generosity in matters of charity, and other qualities of a more intimate nature, they must be left to others to describe. We are concerned here with the man the world knew.

He did not take a surface-car, much less call a taxi. He walked from choice, preferring to spend several dollars' worth of time in an exercise he valued very highly. This, despite the fact that he required a cane, and could move no faster than a one-year-old child. When he reached the Ballou Building, he was tired out, and glad enough to resort to the elevator.

"Mr. Foster does not see callers except by appointment," he was told, in the engineers' reception-room. "Mr. Bates will doubtless be glad to see you, however."

He did not offer a card; he secretly hoped

he might be recognized. But the people in the outer office were all of a younger set, and none knew the rather striking face of the old man, although his white chin-whiskers, short, stubby, and "Dutchy," ought to have stirred their memories. He shook his head about Bates.

"I know the custom," he said in his peculiarly soft voice. "However, it will be necessary for me to see Mr. Foster. I did not make an appointment, but merely telephoned before I left San José, to make sure that he would be here to-day."

So the old fellow was certain that Foster would see him, mused a stenographer. Then the word "San José" did the rest. "You're David Sulzman!" she said with genuine pleasure. And the old man was satisfied.

As he expected, Philip was willing to see him. The old man faced the younger across a low, clay-filled modeling-table, at which Philip had been working when the millionaire entered. "A relief map of the Mount Lassen reservoir system," explained Philip, "which we have just finished for the Volcanic Steam Power people."

"You seem to specialize on big things," remarked David Sulzman; then, as Philip made no comment: "I have come to the right man."

"The right firm," protested the engineer, with a smile. "Bates is the man you should talk to, really; although I am more than glad to have met you." His eyes went back to the clay.

David Sulzman merely made himself a little more comfortable in his chair. "Mr. Bates may be a very clever man, and no doubt is," said he, with his deliberate gentleness. "But the thing I have in mind requires something more than executive ability. It will take originality of the highest possible order."

Philip waved a hand. "Bates will tackle anything under the sun," he declared. "He tells me what is wanted, and I figure it out." Which was a good deal for Philip to admit to a stranger.

"Then what is the use of talking to Bates first?" the millionaire wanted to know, not a change coming to his voice. "Besides, in one sense this is a rather personal matter.

"I have come to you because Catherine Brett requested me to do so."

Philip Foster forgot all about his modeling. He flushed deeply, sensitive fellow that he was, and David Sulzman judged that he might give Catherine an encouraging word when he next saw her.

"To begin with, Mr. Foster," said the old man, not letting the engineer collect words enough for a protest—"to begin with, I must bother you by explaining my own view-point. Otherwise you cannot be of much help to me.

"You know, of course, that I have a good deal of money. You ought to know, too, that whatever truth there may be in some of these magazine attacks on my business methods, the fact remains that the world has had a great deal more leather, because of what I have done, than it would have had otherwise."

"I understand that," Philip hurried to comment. "No thinking person underestimates men of your stamp, Mr. Sulzman."

But the millionaire was not looking for appreciation. "At the same time," he went on, "I am not blind. I realize that the day of the millionaire is almost past. What with income and other forms of taxation, it is not the game it once was. Moreover," and no socialist could have stated this with more conviction than the aged capitalist, "from now on, Mr. Foster, the world intends to encourage the majority, not the minority.

"Now," he became even more earnest, "many men of my station realize this as fully as I do. They know that the future is to see the rise of the working classes. They know that progress must go on and on, until people will one day positively forbid the accumulation of large fortunes, for fear that the welfare of the majority will be crippled thereby.

"And most of my associates have given in with as good grace as they possessed, and to-day are helping in the education drive, as well as other ways, to help lift up the very class of people which they were trying to keep down only a few years ago. Yes," he said, very surely, as Philip made as though to protest; "it is true. I know—I tried to keep them down myself.

"But to-day it is different. As I say, most of my class have turned to helping the progressive movement, hoping in that way to win the good opinion of the people. A few of us are still bitter about it; you can still read a few reactionary journals, which even go so far as to urge slavery as a solution of the labor problem.

"Personally," said the millionaire, a little sadly, "I cannot look at the matter either way. I am no longer young; I lack the kind of fighting spirit that would be required to stop this new progress. Besides, I cannot bring myself to it; I—"

He stopped, and Philip gathered that it was only the old man's pride that had prevented him from taking part in the great interwelfare movement.

He paused, as though resting, and after a while went on: "And yet, like any other man of ambition, I am anxious to leave behind me a name which will live as long as possible. I cannot depend upon my children to perpetuate my memory; the strain may die out in another generation. Neither can I expect my business to do it; the government will take it over, sooner or later, and change the plant's name into a mere number."

He said this with no bitterness.

"Now, Mr. Foster, other men of wealth have sought to immortalize themselves by building libraries, founding colleges, and so forth. They do not seem to realize that a democracy can do anything it chooses with such things, and if the people ever come to believe that these millionaires did more harm than good, their names will be wiped out overnight."

Philip said: "If all saw this matter as clearly as I do, Mr. Sulzman, you would need have no uneasiness."

"That is precisely what I mean," declared the tanner. "It is because I have so little faith in the good sense of the people that I have come to you.

"I want," his voice rose for the first time, so that Philip clearly saw what a dominating figure David Sulzman must have been when younger—"I want you, Foster, to devise something which will resist stupidity, which will guarantee that I shall not be forgotten, come what may!

"I want you to do something which cannot be undone, something which will forever remind the world that David Sulzman once lived in it! I give you *carte blanche*; you shall have every cent I own, if need be! The only thing I require of you is that your work shall benefit the people, either directly or indirectly. Otherwise, the sky is the limit!"

"You mean"—Philip's breath came fast, and his eyes flashed—"you mean, Sulzman, that I am to go as far as I like? To invent anything I choose, build what I think best, so long as it works for the interests of the people in general and at the same time guarantee that they 'shall not forget who did it'?"

As suddenly as it had come, the old man's earnestness disappeared, leaving him a little tired and almost cross. His voice became the same as it had been when he entered.

"You can do anything you damned please, Foster, within the law or outside it, so long as you make the name of Sulzman live!"

CHAPTER IV.

STARTING SOMETHING.

PHILIP jumped to his feet and went to his drawing-table, where he leaned over the board and began to kick the legs of the table—his invariable habit when anything especially interesting was on his mind. He had forgotten that the millionaire's call was due to Catherine Brett, forgotten the understanding with Bates. He subconsciously realized that Sulzman's gigantic proposition was over Bates's head, anyhow.

"You're just the man I've been wanting to get in touch with," he said suddenly and with the bashful smile which only came to his face when he felt thoroughly at home with the smile. "Fact is, Sulzman, although Bates and I have pulled off some pretty unusual stunts, we've never been able to take hold of my really big ideas. And I think I've got the one that 'll fill your qualifications!"

"Could you make it clear to me now,

or would you rather wait until you have turned the matter over in your mind a while?" The aged millionaire might have been referring to the purchase of a pair of socks, for all the concern he showed. The world will some day be told how David Sulzman once cleared a hundred thousand in ten minutes through his masterful ability to handle large affairs in an unconcerned manner.

But Philip Foster was immensely excited. "I think I could do it right now!"—coming back to his chair, sliding half-down into the seat, stopping in this position for five seconds, and then hopping back to the drawing-table. "That is, in general terms. The details probably wouldn't interest you, anyway."

And within the next quarter-hour Philip Foster had unfolded a scheme which sent David Sulzman out of the office in such a nonchalant, confident, jaunty mood that any one who knew him intimately would have declared: "He's just found out something that pleases him immensely." But those who sat in the train with him never guessed that the old man with the quaint goatee was already anticipating a dream come true, a scheme which would immortalize him, and by so doing influence the life of every man, woman, and child on the earth.

As for Philip, he went at once to his partner. It will be remembered that Bates's campaign was a failure. Probably this tempered his egotism; for instead of disputing Philip's action, he meekly agreed that the hitherto silent partner had best handle the whole thing alone.

Within a week a new organization, known as the Foster Construction Company, was well under way. Arrangements were made for receiving the products of nearly twenty factories, products of a rather curious nature, handled in such a way as to insure very little talk. And mean time superintendents and foremen of exceptional ability were secured by the offer of extraordinary salaries, while a veritable army of skilled laborers was recruited in the same way.

Philip went to see Catherine a few days after David Sulzman's call. He thanked her formally for what she had done.

"You will have to take the credit, or the blame," he said, with his diffident smile, "for whatever we do, Sulzman and I. You've thrown two men together who have the same potential ability for getting results as nitric acid and glycerin!"

She realized that this was quite a speech, for Philip, and more than half suspected that it was rehearsed—which happened to be true. But she said, with just the right amount of shyness:

"I couldn't forget what you told me the other night when we were talking about the moon. About—about your wanting to get rich, you know."

Philip looked up, startled. Ever since Sulzman's advent Philip had given no thought to the other ambition.

"You're wonderfully—" He stammered at a loss whether to say "thoughtful" or "solicitous."

Catherine's face became radiant, and she swayed nearer to him.

"Why shouldn't I be?" she murmured, her eyes fixed on his. Next instant she turned away, as though aghast at her daring; so she never saw the bewilderment on Philip's face. A moment later, greatly to her disappointment, he said he would have to say good-by.

"Going to be an outside man now, for a few months," he told her. His enthusiasm mounted rapidly, and he smiled almost continually as he spoke of the trip he expected to make—an airplane flight to Ecuador, to begin the next morning. "Expect to reach Quito at twelve thirty-five the next afternoon," said he, happily. "Send you some photos."

She held his gaze for a second before remarking very quietly: "Aren't you going to leave one of yourself?"

"Why"—a little flattered—"if you like; I'll put it in the mail as soon as I get back to my quarters." He moved toward the door; then, his laggard memory finally wrenching an item from his unused stock of small talk, he stopped short. "Have you a picture of yourself which I might have?" Unconsciously he made the request seem urgent.

Catherine kept her face averted, for fear it might give her away. She found a small,

semiformal photo which emphasized the appeal in her eyes, rather than the beauty of her face. He took it from her with extravagant thanks.

And it was in just this mood that Philip went to the door. Catherine accompanied him thoughtfully; and as he looked back at her for what he knew would be the last time in several months, there came over him exactly the same feeling he would have known if, after several weeks of helplessness in a hospital, he were told that he would get well.

In his joy and excitement he would feel like hugging the nurse, in whose company he had been fearfully embarrassed before. And to-night he was jubilant, jubilant as a boy on Fourth of July morning; the fact that the "nurse" was a beautiful young woman of great wealth did not alter the case. Just as the man who is usually at ease becomes agitated when a real crisis arises, Philip Foster, ordinarily as shy and awkward as an adolescent girl, became perfectly at ease when the great moment came.

And yet, if Catherine had taken leave of him in a sad or pensive mood, he would not have done it. It was largely because she smiled up brightly at him in her effort to hide her feelings, that his exuberance reached the overflowing point.

"Well—see you in October then!" he exclaimed, as they clasped hands; and then, to her utter amazement, he swept her into his arms and gave her a boisterous kiss!

CHAPTER V.

THE MOON BACKSLIDES.

OF course, Philip was thunderstruck at his presumption, as soon as he had left the house. He wrote a very contrite note to accompany the photo he had promised, adding: "I hope you do not consign this to the ash-barrel because of my folly last night." Then, confident that he had dealt with the case in the most approved manner, he completely forgot about it.

Two days later found him, as he had said to Catherine, descending from the Inter-

continental Aerial Stage landing at Quito. He spent several days in this place, getting in touch with the various factors of his enterprise.

Before he left for the interior, the first shipment of supplies, still in their original cars, arrived via the Pacific Submarine Freight Company's service and the Quito-to-the-Sea Tunnel.

Philip and his associates at once proceeded with the construction of a railroad, using the most up-to-date apparatus in the work and employing a gang to every half-mile; with the result that two months after the first shovelful was scooped, a complete equipment of rolling stock was plying over the three-hundred-mile stretch of line which lay roughly southeast of the capital.

Meanwhile buildings had been put up for men and machines; and by that time Philip was hard at work in Peru, putting the finishing-touches on a huge electric power plant high in the Andes. In all of this, the vast wealth of David Sulzman figured conspicuously, breaking down all governmental interference and securing real cooperation. There were no serious delays.

Philip had been away just five months when a peculiar thing happened, or, rather, began to happen. The general public was the last to notice it; the astronomers were the first, followed closely by the navigators, surveyors and others who had occasion to watch the heavens with any degree of accuracy. It is said that some of the old seafaring men along the water-fronts, watching the tides, noticed it before anybody else; but that is unlikely. What happened is this:

The moon began to slow up. The month began to lengthen. The almanacs all fell into disrepute; for, instead of rising fifty-one minutes later each night, as had been the satellite's average, she now lagged behind this figure until, after a week, her average was over fifty-two minutes!

A small matter, apparently; but to any one who knows how mathematically precise are all the movements of the heavenly bodies, the thing was simply terrific. In every observatory, all other investigations were dropped entirely in order that the whole staff might observe the new phenomenon.

The moon, which for untold ages and with unfailing regularity had circled the earth once every twenty-seven days, was actually slowing down before their eyes!

The public had scarcely done with discussing this mystery before there came an announcement which almost eclipsed the first one. It ran:

"It has been observed, in all parts of the world, that the daily revolution of the earth itself is changing. Instead of twenty-four hours, our day is now twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes and fifty-eight seconds long!"

This did not seem possible. Could it be that Mother Earth, who had not been known to vary the thousandth part of a second in the regularity of her spinning, had really begun to speed up a bit in her old days? It took a long time for most people to accept this; until, in fact, a few dependable citizens had had a chance to watch a few dependable clocks. It was true; *the day was shortening.*

But the next thing to attract attention was noticed first of all by a class of people who seldom pay much attention to scientific affairs. The folks here meant usually go by the name of "spooners."

"Honey—how big the moon seems tonight!" was the way the convention had started among these people for ages and ages. Now, it came to have a new meaning. The moon certainly did look big.

"It's due to an optical illusion, deary," was the usual explanation, such as had been given from all time. "If there were no objects on the earth between the moon and you, sweetheart, it wouldn't look so big."

But as night after night passed and the satellite seemed to grow very slightly larger each time, there came a time when everybody on the earth was aware of the new marvel. Shortly there came a third announcement from the authorities, an announcement somewhat delayed as a matter of policy.

"Let no one be alarmed," was this statement; "but the fact is that while the moon's speed has been decreasing, her distance from the earth has also been reduced.

"She is now twenty thousand miles

nearer the earth than she has ever been before. She is falling toward us at the rate of a thousand miles a day!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORLD AWAKES.

THE next three months were the most extraordinary since the deluge. Never before had the world been threatened as it was now threatened. For, unless something happened to stop the moon before she fell the rest of the way to the earth, most certainly the entire globe, together with every living thing upon it, was doomed to absolute annihilation.

"Do not get excited!" the authorities cautioned, again and again, as soon as the announcement had been made. "We will soon discover the cause of this mystery, and then doubtless be able to remedy matters. Keep cool!"

But it did no good. Wherever there was a mind with imagination enough to see what this thing really meant, there also was fear. It was impossible to keep up courage in the face of that ever-nearing satellite, unless one had an especially strong mind. And those whose minds were strong did their best to forget their own fears, by trying to quiet those of others.

The only thing that had helped was religion. Everywhere the churches were crowded to the doors; services were held every day, all day long. Vast crowds gathered on the mountain-tops, like the worshipers of old, and madly prayed to God to prevent the disaster. Every soul on earth was searched to its depths by the approaching catastrophe.

Out of all that wild period there emerge two facts which need to be recorded. One is the Second Ark, a tremendous antigravitational machine built by a Syrian named Ben Malik.

"This is the end of the world!" Ben Malik proclaimed, like Noah had done thousands of years before. The Syrian went to prodigious expense to get publicity. "Out of the earth's billions I shall be able to save one hundred. A hundred, no more, may escape the anger of God. Let the devout

assemble and examine themselves, that the fittest of them all may survive, to start life again on some other world!"

People flocked to this call. For weeks the self-examination went on, until nearly half a billion of the less intelligent peoples of the globe had gone through a winnowing process which left just a thousand—half men and half women—who were adjudged equally competent to represent the human race.

Ben Malik himself was not among them; he was a cripple. And for lack of any better method of picking the final hundred, the Syrian decided to leave it to chance. "The Lottery of the Lord," it was called.

But Ben Malik wanted to make sure. His was one soul in millions; not only was he willing to stay behind in order that a better man might take his place, but he felt constrained to give his Ark a trial trip before the great event took place.

The trial failed. The Ark, a hastily constructed affair, rose to a height of fifty miles and then broke under the strain of its own machinery. It and Ben Malik were totally destroyed.

The other great result of that wonderful period was the political revival. Obviously the swift approach of the moon meant that in a few weeks there would be no such thing as political parties, no such thing as social caste, no such thing as capital and labor. On Friday, the 27th of October, ignorance and wisdom alike were to perish, culture and rudeness were to be no more, poverty and wealth to come to an eternal end!

And it did not take the world long to see this. As always, the people of the thinking middle classes were the first to state the situation.

"Let us forget our differences," was the upshot of what they said. "There is nothing to be gained by contention now; the 27th of October will reduce us to a common level.

"Let us make the remaining days as agreeable as possible."

Of course, there were many who took this as a license. Among this class, the last few weeks were spent in rioting and licentiousness which went past anything the

world had ever known before. No attempt was made to stop these persons; law and order were enforced only when the safety of other people was endangered.

But the great majority of folks saw the thing more seriously. They saw that not one of them could escape the calamity; in those days there was but one known method of getting away from the earth, and that was the method used by Ben Malik, who had scoured the globe to get enough of a certain element to make his single ill-fated attempt.

And so it came about that because it did no good whatever to think of self first, men began to think of others. Only a few weeks till the end of all things! Very well; why not make those few weeks devoid of misery? Why not fill them with happiness, so that when the end should come, it would find men with at least some agreeable memories to take with them.

It was a marvelous thought. Partly, it originated in the churches; partly with the socialists. And before long mankind was gazing upon itself in amazement.

For the earth was transformed. Where before there had been terrible poverty, even in the most enlightened countries, now every effort was made to relieve all suffering. Great hoards of foodstuffs, held for speculation by profiteers, were distributed overnight to the needy. The same with clothing, building materials, fuel and, finally, luxuries. If all was to be destroyed, why not make use of it first?

For the first time in history thrift did not pay. No one could gain by "putting something by." The aim now was to spend, spend for the good and the wholesome, spend for experiences which would leave pleasant memories. Memories! That was what was wanted! Memories which would make the next world worth while!

Couples who had been postponing marriage "until there's money in the bank," got married at once, finding an infinite satisfaction in knowing that the next world would not be a lonesome place.

People of wealth, who formerly had kept aloof from those less fortunate, who had been enjoying their station in life as selfishly as they knew how—such people suddenly

found themselves longing for something more substantial than memories of extravagance. Instead—

They began to find rare pleasure in helping those who needed help. They became eager in their efforts to give happiness. Shortly men and women of vast wealth turned their magnificent homes over to those who, because of misfortune and weakness, had known nothing better than tene-ments.

And a time came when people who had previously thought nothing of keeping half a hundred people from useful industry in order that their mansions might be "properly served"—a time came when these millionaires fought hysterically among themselves for the privilege of service, for the chance to make some one happy for a few hours.

And another class of people who, before, had gone about their work in a sullen spirit, convinced that their employers were robbers, were amazed to find a wonderful satisfaction in working as they had never worked before. They took vast pride in careful workmanship, got vast satisfaction from a consciousness of service rendered well. The end should find them on the job!

Memories! Memories of work well done, of something accomplished for the welfare of others. Memories of the blissful look that came to the face of one who had been presented with a right long withheld. Above all, the knowledge of having done something at last to right the fearful injustice of the world!

CHAPTER VII.

MADE IN AMERICA.

PHILIP FOSTER had been away about eight months when, quite unexpectedly, he returned. He brought with him certain Intercontinental officials whose names need not enter this account, officials who had been invited to the plant in Ecuador. Philip did not go home at all; he merely sent Catherine an aerogram, and proceeded straight to Washington.

On the same day, and for the first time, newspapermen were permitted on the

grounds of the Foster Construction Company's plant. They found that the word "grounds" scarcely did the place justice; "tract" would have been more accurate; for there were about fifty square miles of the wildest mountain territory, all carefully guarded by several companies of aerial and ground patrols.

These reporters immediately transmitted their negatives by the Pacific Wireless Photography Service to the League of Nations Daily Screen News, who distributed the films to all parts of the earth by plane; so that Philip's little speech was flashed before the public in several million talking-picture theaters, at the same time the reporters' material was released.

"Friends and fellow citizens of the earth," began the engineer, using the English language, at that time the nearest approach to a universal tongue, "in behalf of my associate, David Sulzman, I wish to explain the thing that has worried us so long, and then get your judgment as to our future course of action.

"As I need not tell you, the moon, which has been dropping toward the earth for the past three months, came to a halt night before last, and has since showed no motion whatever. We seem to be in no danger now of that collision.

"At the same time"—and here a photo of the moon took the speaker's place on the screen, while his voice went on—"at the same time, the moon has entirely ceased her former monthly trips around the earth. And our day has been decreased to something like twenty-two hours.

"Now, be patient with me, but I've got to remind you that the moon, when she finally did come to a stop, did so on the side of the earth opposite from the sun. That is to say, we now see the moon each and every night; she rises when the sun goes down, and does not set till the sun rises again eleven hours later."

Philip need not have apologized; people never grew tired of hearing this incredible fact put into words. He hurried on:

"As a result, the whole world now enjoys full moon every night. Only, compared to what we used to call full moon, she's a supermoon now.

"To-night the moon is only a tenth as far away as she used to be." And the screen showed a small landscape of a part of the earth, with the satellite in the background. A hundred times the size she had been three months before, the moon was now an enormous, shining globe of tremendous brilliance and beauty, seemingly near enough to be touched with the fingers. She occupied a space larger than the bowl of the Great Dipper.

"If it were not for the fear she has aroused," continued the man of science, "we'd appreciate her more. The moon now lights our nights for us as they've never been lit before. We don't need artificial lights now, except for very special purposes; our country roads are as bright as our streets ever were; our streets brighter than any café.

"At the same time the moon has caused our tides to become immensely higher, and our ocean waves much greater. This has compelled some of our seacoast towns to rebuild extensively. On the other hand, it has enormously increased the output of our wave-motor system, so that we are now able to dispense with wood, coal, and petroleum entirely. In short, the moon has made us a present of enough power to turn every wheel in existence; and for all practical purposes, she has abolished night."

He made only brief mention of the great religious and social revivals, and their consequences. Not that Philip Foster was out of sympathy; instead, he was tremendously glad to see justice brought about as it had been. He was before the people merely as an engineer, and as an engineer he talked on.

Then came the sensation. The films which had been sent from Ecuador were shown. And for the first time the world learned what the secrecy-shrouded enterprise had been.

The most important of the great group of buildings which comprised the company's plant was a giant, dome-shaped structure, exactly like an observatory on a mammoth scale. Within it, and visible through an open slot, stood a colossal telescope. That is, it appeared to be a telescope, until its nature was revealed.

"This," it was explained, "is a device for projecting large quantities of radioactive elements to a distance. It is operated by means of electrical current taken from a hydraulic plant in Peru, and is capable of exerting terrific force."

As this was said, the "telescope" was slowly brought to the horizontal, and trained upon a range of peaks several miles away. The scene was next shifted to this range.

"A small amount of power will now be released," went on the explanation. "Watch closely the rocks on the top of the nearest peak." This was about a quarter of a mile away.

Next moment a wonderful thing occurred. A very large boulder, apparently of granite and weighing many hundreds of tons, was slowly toppled over by some invisible force; so that in a moment it was rolling and tumbling, end over end, down the side of the peak.

"The power-plant is located opposite the camera." As this was said more boulders were dislodged and sent flying down-hill, until the air was thick with rock-dust. There was a slight wait till this had settled; then came the finishing touch.

"Watch the entire peak this time."

At first nothing could be seen. Nothing appeared to be happening. Then, very slowly indeed, a change occurred in the outline of the mountain. Another moment, and one could see that its upper half was shifting. Before two minutes were up, the entire top of the peak had moved out of place among its fellows, so that it finally stood with one edge overhanging a deep chasm.

And then, while millions of people gasped in amazement, that whole vast mass of granite was tipped up, up and over, until it toppled inertly into what had been the cañon. At the same time there was a sharp earthquake, which was noted by seismographs in all part of the globe.

Then came a quick "flash—" back to the ray-projector, where a streak of blinding white light, about two hundred yards long, was now being emitted from its orifice. As the picture came to an end, the light began to subside very slowly.

The voice and figure of Philip Foster came back to the screen. "I suppose you've guessed it now," said he, with a return of his diffident smile. "The Foster Construction Company is responsible for the moon's backsliding!

"Every day for the past several months, when the moon had passed the meridian, we have been playing these rays upon her western, or left-hand, edge. You will understand that the left edge of the moon is her 'front,' with respect to her motion in space. Well, for six hours daily that 'telescope' has been pushing with all its might!

"That's why the moon has come to a stop, and why the earth has come to revolve faster. By turning on this power very gradually each day, and, turning it off just as slowly when the moon had set, we've been able to use Ecuador as a fulcrum without the knowledge of any one else on the earth."

It was not until then that the supreme audacity of the thing seemed to dawn upon the scientist. His face changed, and a certain amount of determination came into it as he finished.

"Ever since the moon fell to its present distance of twenty-four thousand miles, the projector has been trained upon the center of her disk, instead of upon her western edge. In this way the moon has been prevented from falling any nearer—the whole matter has been calculated with extreme care, of course—and so long as our supply of certain chemicals holds out, we can keep the moon just where she is. I may add that we have a duplicate equipment to guard against accident.

"Now, the future is up to you, people. The company can keep the moon in its present position for a year. Or, it can proceed to undo what has been done, and restore the moon to exactly its former position and speed. In either case, the world's entire supply of the necessary materials will be used up in the process."

He waited a moment before going on. In the mean time, the feelings of those who were watching and listening, can best be imagined. What a choice he was offering!

"However," he continued, now smiling broadly, "there is a third alternative. It is this:

"That suitable sky-cars, already completed and thoroughly tried out, be sent with men and materials at once to the moon's surface. And once there, this equipment would proceed to make the moon's present position *permanent*.

"It would be done by means of miniature projectors, using— However, these details are a little intricate. You will find them discussed in a pamphlet the company is issuing. You may take my word for it that the method will succeed.

"So there you are. Either we (1) keep the moon on the job as a curiosity for about a year, and then let the smash come, or (2), we push her back where she used to be right away, or (3), make a real job of it, and keep her where she is as long as she'll stay!

"Take your choice! I thank you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN—

CATHERINE had had plenty of time to think it over. Philip's lack of response to her letters bore out her suspicions, first aroused by his note apologizing for having kissed her. By the time Catherine had recovered from the astonishment of Philip's announcement to the world, she had resolved to match boldness with boldness. She would demonstrate her worthiness by being as audacious, in her own sphere, as he had been in the realm of science.

Once more the considerate reader must remember her theory of love and marriage; she was confident that ardor would come out of such a rationally made union. And she made her plans in all sincerity, sure that nothing but good would come from it all.

When Philip reached California he proceeded to call at once upon all whom he felt he should see. He made out a list in his methodical way, mapping his route so as to make every minute count. His one idea was to get it over, so that his time might afterward be occupied with something more valuable than social obligations.

He had figured that eight minutes, pos-

sibly seven and a half, would elapse between leaving and reentering his plane at the Brett home. As he ran up the steps he was already estimating the amount of time probably necessary for the next call. In each case he had taken pains to make sure that the person he wished to see would be at home at that particular hour.

But he suspected nothing whatever when, as he was announced at the Brett drawing-room, he found the place already nearly filled with callers. He never did know that an impromptu tea had been hastily arranged. He only wondered that Catherine should have so many callers so early in the afternoon.

He stood, embarrassed as usual, looking over the people before him. There was a small knot of women in the further corner. The butler spoke his name; and with remarkable speed the knot untangled, revealing Catherine herself at the center of the snarl.

She gazed at the returned hero as though she were entranced. She stood there for exactly the right length of time to get everybody's attention; then, her face changed, she gave an enraptured gasp, and in half a second had crossed that room, as it seemed, on wings.

Just in front of Philip she paused, for the briefest possible instant, peering at him as though to make sure her eyes were not deceiving her. Then she gave a tiny, happy, hysterical laugh, and swayed suddenly toward him. He involuntarily thrust out his arms; the fixed smile was still on his face.

And then her arms were about his neck, and his about her shoulders. The scientist had no time, no warning, no chance.

"Phil, my dear!" cried Catherine Brett.

Of course, it is all old news now, but it's a bona fide part of this account and therefore must be mentioned. By this is meant the remarkable end of the whole Foster-Sulzman scheme.

In one way or another the people of the world managed to express their choice of the three alternatives Philip had named. In the more advanced countries the thing was done by direct vote of the citizens them-

selves. In others, where the majority were not capable of forming an opinion, it was done for them by their representatives, whether political or ecclesiastical.

And when it is remembered that the moon's previous position and motions had had a very definite influence upon religious history in some lands, it is really remarkable that there was not more opposition than did develop. However, even the Brahmins finally came to see that the masses would be greatly benefited by the electrical power which the moon's new location would insure. Practically the whole world agreed to making the "new moon," as it was called, a permanent institution.

Consequently Philip and his associates, after remaining in the United States about two weeks, returned to their plant with the League of Nations itself backing their work. However, those two weeks were extremely significant ones.

Philip was daily in Catherine's company. He had, of course, felt obliged to go through with the thing according to Catherine's lead. His disposition would not allow anything else.

She had explained her theory; he had been unwilling to argue about it. And one day he found himself asking her to fix the day, quite without knowing that she had manipulated the conversation so as to make him do it.

They were to be married as soon as he came back from the moon. This was settled a week before he started. And during that last week the scientist looked at the matter just as cold-bloodedly as Catherine had looked at it some time before.

He saw that Catherine Brett was as unlike himself as any one could possibly be. At first he argued that "opposites attract"; then he began to look for some one point on which they could agree, a sort of home base, to which they could fly in case of differences.

There didn't seem to be any. Neither he nor Catherine was in love with any one thing. Even in love of country they differed; for while Catherine was an orthodox American, Philip was an internationalist, as might be expected in a man of his type of mind.

As for simple, elemental, animal attraction—even Catherine was obliged to admit that as yet she didn't care for Philip's embraces more than, say, her brother's. She may have been right in insisting that all this would come in time; but Philip continued to look for "something to hitch to." And he couldn't find it.

On the other hand, he found plenty of real obstacles; Catherine liked poodles; he, Philip, loved children. Also he was passionately addicted to trap-shooting, and very apt to get up at two o'clock in the morning, during the winter, in order to slay ducks. And for this kind of insanity Catherine had an absolute horror; she had had a relative hurt in a hunting accident, and she would certainly worry every minute.

In petty matters—which often loom pretty large—there were more objections. Philip was inclined to be stout, and liked to have the house warmed to precisely sixty-eight degrees or lower. Catherine, being slender, required a temperature about six degrees higher. Moreover—don't laugh; this is deadly serious—Philip was a great lover of the photoplay, which Catherine simply could not tolerate.

Of course they respected one another. Philip stood in awe of Catherine's social prestige and business acumen, while she fairly worshiped his profession. But Philip did not agree that Catherine, in throwing herself into his arms, had thereby matched his own boldness.

"What you did was old, old stuff," he might have told her had he been conteited enough, which he wasn't. "What I did was absolutely new."

But Philip never realized what a terrific effort it cost Catherine to make her actions appear natural on that occasion. Only a woman could appreciate that supreme play.

And only a man could comprehend to the full the mental and moral agony the man went through before he finally began the moon's transfer.

So neither understood the other. And the great difference between them can best be stated by simply remarking this: that, whereas, Catherine was not aware that she did not fully appreciate Philip's feat, yet he plainly saw that he could never properly

value hers. It was the old, old distinction between the mind that has ceased to expand, and the mind that is ever expanding.

CHAPTER IX.

—IN THE MOON.

IT was done. Nearly half the moon was gone—the half the world had never seen, and now was never to see. It was blown into space by the steady pressure of what are now known as "Foster's rays." At times the cloud of powdered rock-dust was clearly visible from the earth as the material was ejected from the surface.

It is only necessary here to add that the insignificant gravitation of the moon was not enough to pull any of this dust back to the surface. It was hurtled into the void, never to return.

In this way, just as Philip had outlined, the mass of the moon was decreased to the exact point where the sun's pull, added to that of the earth, amounted to just enough to keep the moon in place. As we look up at the immense disk above us to-night—always there, night after night, turning what once was blackness into continuous twilight—as we look up at her, we take it for granted that she will always look just like that; that she will forever continue to circle the sun, instead of the earth. The younger generation will find it hard to believe that she was once a pitifully small object, giving only a hundredth part of the light she now gives.

Of course she is only half a moon now, as a result of what Philip and his associates accomplished. But the half that is left is the half which people have always seen.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that miniature projectors were used to propel the heat-and-cold-proof sky-cars through space. Buoyed up on those irresistible rays of invisible force, the vast loads of men, machines, and materials necessary for the work were transported quite without difficulty. In fact, up to the very last day the whole enterprise was carried off without any loss of life, and with only a few trifling accidents. That made the last day's record even more of a shock to the world.

For, upon the return of the last sky-car to the earth, people were startled beyond measure to learn that Philip Foster himself had lost his life just as the work was being completed.

"He left the sky-car, dressed as usual in a protective, insulated suit, taking enough oxygen to last over an hour." So ran the official report of the superintendent, who immediately wired a copy to Catherine. "He said he intended to take pictures of a near-by crater before its destruction.

"No one saw fit to watch his actions. He was out of sight for perhaps half an hour; then some one saw him on the edge of the crater taking photos. He again disappeared. It was thought that he was returning to the sky-car as he knew that the crater was next in line for the projecting crew.

"But just as the men were sweeping the rays in that direction three men in the sky-car plainly saw Mr. Foster standing motionless half-way down the inner slope of the crater, out of sight of the workers. There was no mistaking his suit; it was different from the others. And before the three men could warn the crew, the crater was wiped off the moon.

"Mr. Foster probably did not suffer, for the reason that the shock of the rays would certainly have caused concussion of the brain. A thorough search of the locality was made as soon as the rays were stopped, but quite without results. At this moment the unfortunate man's remains are now flying through space in the direction of the constellation Hercules."

And yet, before the last of the sky-cars had put a thousand miles between itself and the moon, a strange sight would have met the eyes of any person who might have been left behind. There were no telescopes aboard the car which would have shown the thing. Neither was any one on the lookout.

Directly beneath the sky-car, on the patch of the moon's surface which the machine had just quit, there was a stir and a movement in the soil. Presently a large, square section of the sun-lit material was in actual motion; and before the eyes of the mythical beholder, a cavern was revealed in the solid rock of the satellite.

A minute passed, and then a figure clad

in a suit the exact duplicate of the one the three observers had seen destroyed, clambered lightly to the surface, and turned the big glass eyes of its helmet up toward the fast-disappearing sky-car. It was the figure of a man of medium height, inclined to be stout, who slouched somewhat even as he sat on the edge of the pit.

No one needs to be told that it was Philip Foster. And a glance into the cavern would have told the whole story. The place was stocked with enough supplies of all sorts, very scientifically selected, to last one man a lifetime.

Presently the engineer disappeared, to return with the framework of a small, hemispherical building, which he at once proceeded to set up over his cavern. When finished, some time later, it provided him with a neat, little, combined observatory, drawing-room, wireless-station and living-room, all incased in glass.

To-day an unusually fine and powerful wireless tower stands in the mountains of California; and under the direction of John Bates, sworn to secrecy, the news of the world is daily transmitted into space. On the moon, a former fellow citizen hears what earth's billions are doing.

All about him is desolate wilderness. The sun shines continually just above the eastern horizon; there is neither day nor night. Always the dark side of the earth is toward him; he sees very little of the globe he renounced. He never talks to a living soul, although he makes a great many talking-machine records; why, we need not try to tell.

But he has a great deal to be thankful for. He has plenty to eat and to drink; the air he breathes is chemically pure; he always has the great black above him, every star shining with vast greater brilliance than we on earth ever know. And beside him at all times is his beloved library, the condensed compendium of all the information that is worth while to him.

And back in Bates's office, in his safe, is a sealed document which is to be opened only in a certain contingency. In the vaults of a well-known bank rests a large chest, in which, among other things, is a duplicate of this document.

And—mark this—so far as any one on earth knows, there are not enough of the required chemicals in existence to produce the "Foster rays" once more. The moon will never be visited again!

As we enjoy our satellite this evening, if we happen to possess extra keen eyes we can detect a short, dark streak across the face of our moon; a streak which no astronomer ever saw in the old days. And if we use a small opera-glass, we can see just what it is.

For the Foster Construction Company made a thorough job of the moon's transformation. All the while that the crews were blasting on the other side, another

crew of chemists was at work on the earthward face. Look closely through that glass, and this is what you will read:

GIFT OF DAVID SULZMAN.

But, although many of us will utter the old guess about "the man in the moon," and many will recall the supposedly tragic fate of the Californian engineer, only a very, very few will know that there is now an actual, bona-fide, flesh-and-blood being on its surface. That an American citizen now lives there, its sole inhabitant, and the only genuinely independent man in all creation.

For he, of all men, is absolutely safe from the other sex!

(The end.)



A cluster of strange white shapes swarmed over his struggling figure

The Snow Girl

Last of the unexplored continents, snow-bound Antarctica held strange mysteries for the intrepid men who braved its blizzards, the South Pole flyers Welch and Dragon

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

*"Frozen beauty, untouched by warming sun:
Maiden carved in marble. Is she to be wooed?
Is she to be won?"*

CHAPTER I.

THE BLIZZARD FROM THE POLE.

THE blizzard swept down from the Pole on the night of July 3. It began in early evening, wholly without warning. We had had a clear, purple sky, star strewn. White,

cold and brilliant were the stars as seen from this ten-thousand-foot altitude beyond the Great Ice Barrier. There was no wind. The temperature was twenty-four below Fahrenheit. Then all in a moment the blizzard was upon us. A blast of wind, unheralded. A slanting whirl of snow.

It was 9.15 P.M. We used Greenwich time, here at the Plateau Station.

The schedule of the newly established Transpolar Line was clocked with Greenwich; it had been official now for five years for all air traffic. By nine thirty the accursed blizzard was roaring in a way that in my first winter here I had thought romantic. This was not one of the freak "blue blizzards," which, since they were first observed in 1955, had been an enigma outstanding even among the many freaks of Antarctic weather. This was not one of those, but an old-fashioned one, what we called a "hell-roarer."

There is a fearsome aspect to an Antarctic blizzard; I think beyond all other threats of nature it is the most awe inspiring. In the summer daylight it is bad enough; a drift of snow so dense that the daylight comes dully through; a mad blast whirling at a hundred miles an hour.

In the winter it is incredibly worse: infuriated elements in the darkness of the polar night. The world is a void, grisly and appalling, with the stabbing, freezing blast of death roaring like a mad monster run amuck, eager for something human to devour.

I sat with David Dragon this night of July 3, in our instrument room, listening to the howl of the storm. We were snug enough. There was nothing to fear. Yet the blizzard of the South Pole has a menace inescapable.

David cursed. "This thing will bury us if it keeps on. We should have a decent system of tunnels, Joe."

"I would. Give the men something to do. They're getting fat and lazy anyway."

WE had some forty men here at the station, a rough but good-natured crew. Three were married, and had their wives here. What a life for a woman! Several of

the older men had had polar experience with the old-time exploring expeditions of twenty or thirty years past, just when the airplane was changing everything. We had them, with their rough and ready scientific knowledge; and a corps of mechanics and ex-flyers. And the all-important cook and his helpers.

There was little to do. The Transpolar liner went through only once a fortnight; sometimes it did not even stop.

We always kept supplies here: food, fuel, and a well-equipped machine shop; half a dozen small emergency planes; dogs and sleds and a motor tank sled which was supposed to be marvelous, but in reality wasn't worth a damn in weather like this.

We were some three hundred miles from the Pole. There was, just established this year, a station similar to ours at the South Pole itself; and another at Little America on the Ross Sea, at the Bay of Whales near the edge of the Barrier. This was all territory belonging to the United States of America. The transcontinental trail was built with American capital, and the airline was financed by American millionaires, but it was government operated, as was nearly everything here in Antarctica.

A wild desolation, this Antarctic Continent; even now much of it was unknown. Naked rock, with a permanent mantle of ice and snow. Rivers and inland seas that never thawed; mountains massed with ice; congealed volcanos. It was a dead land, the home of the blizzard.

A continent of four million six hundred thousand square miles—as large as the United States and Mexico—it lay here astride of the South Pole, in general shape not unlike that of South

America. Its coast was all explored and charted. But its vast interior, its great reaches of plateau, and its tumbled mountain passes were, most of them, as unknown to-day as in the bygone times when Scott and Amundsen struggled here and Byrd founded the first permanent settlement of Little America.

The Polar airline, in the maintenance of which we were a link, came from Dunedin, New Zealand, crossed the Ross Sea, passed us, and the Pole, and continued north to Cape Town. It was the only airline over all Antarctica. A hazardous flight at best, and in the winter months, Heaven knows, but little less than foolhardy. Yet the traffic was encouraging; the route, with its New Zealand and African connections, began paying almost from the first. And so far, in twenty odd flights, there had been no disaster.

The liner was not due now until July 10. I recall that this night of July 3, as David and I sat listening to the blizzard, we had no intimation that anything unusual was impending. The blizzard certainly was usual enough. But by ten thirty it was obvious that it was worse than the usual run of them, even for this midwinter season.

"WE'LL be buried," David repeated. He went to one of our windows. We were in a low board room. The roof of the building was no more than fifteen feet above ground. A sturdy frame affair, with its special construction it was almost impervious to wind and cold. The window was high. Looking through its double pane we could just see over the frozen snow level; the flood lights of the landing field showed as a dim vague radiance through the howling white murk.

Buried? If this kept up, within a few hours our cañons of paths between the buildings of the station would be filled. They should have been roofed over into tunnels, as David said.

Our commander had gone on the last trip of the liner to his sick wife in Cape Town. David was in temporary charge of the station. I was radio-phone operator. I had been, in my twenty-two years, almost everything incongruous, from mechanic at Bennett Field, New York, to flyer on a local mail route over the New Zealand mountains; student at the Belfast University, and wireless operator of a tanker that took me everywhere. An Irishman; my name, Joe Welch; short, stocky, redheaded, and a scrapper by nature, as David very often reminded me.

"Lucky the ship isn't due to-night," David commented. "One of these times they'll hit into a blizzard like this."

His gesture was expressive of the great air liner flung like a feather into perdition. He stretched his huge, lean length into a chair; picked up a book, yawned and flung it down.

"Hell of a life, Joe."

"Right," I agreed. I prepared to send my eleven o'clock routine report to headquarters in Little America, or to the American Meteorologic Station in Dunedin if I could get them direct.

"Get your statistics, David."

He yawned again and left the room. My best friend, this David Dragon. He was an orphan like myself, but with a far better education than I, and a flair for science as well as adventure. David at this time was twenty-six. A lean, powerful giant of a fellow; crisp, wavy brown hair; a rugged, handsome face, keen blue eyes, and an ability to handle men for all his lazy good

nature. A fellow of innate refinement and culture, gone like myself somewhat profane from living so constantly among men.

He came back in a moment; tossed me his scribbled memoranda. "Roaring like forty demons, and the worst is yet to come, Joe. Minus 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Barometer down another two-tenths. Ralston says the anemometer won't register all the wind."

"What's it give?"

"Hundred and thirty-two miles an hour. Nice little breeze. But it actually might be two hundred, Ralston says. It's a wonder somebody wouldn't invent some decent instruments."

He slouched down beside me. The low room shook with a blast of wind. The snow was piled solid now against the window. "Rattle it off, Joe. And if you get Dunedin, or anywhere else in civilization, tell them, with my love, that I damn well wish they were here—and I were there."

I tried for Dunedin on the radio-phone, and then on the short wave. But before I got them the near-by operator at Little America cut in, calling me. His voice was tense.

I took the message. My face must have gone white, for David stared at me in astonishment.

"What is it?"

"Clarke. Special flyer coming through to-night."

"The hell there is." He went grim. "Are they crazy?"

"Wait." I took the rest of it. I could not hear Clarke very well, and he seemed hardly able to hear me at all. The interference, due to this accursed blizzard, rattled my head phone like a million tiny drums gone mad. I recall that at first I was annoyed at Clarke. Damn fools to check a ship through on a night like this. If it was

forced down—a hundred miles from here say—we'd have a fine chance of getting out to it! But in a moment I was white and shaking, with stark fear striking at me. Helga was on this flyer!

"HELGA?" David gasped.

"Don't know."

"Tell Clarke to hold it. This is no regular storm!"

"The liner's gone past Clarke. They checked it through; conditions weren't like this down there."

"Tell him to call it back." David was pacing the room with gigantic strides. "Crazy idiot! Hasn't he got communication? Can't he call it back? Where is it, Joe?"

"Just left there. Wait, I can't hear him. Oh, damn this storm!"

I got the full details from Clarke. He had been trying to get me for half an hour. His chief had passed the liner; then tried to recall it as the storm swept down—but could not establish communication.

Clarke's signals died. In this accursed storm everything was uncertain. I tried for him and then gave it up. David stared at me.

"Well?"

"Well, that's all. We're out of business, or Clarke is, or the plane is. Everybody, probably."

Helga coming? Clarke had given me a message from her. Coming here to see David and me on a small flyer, on official business of the United States War Department.

"What's that mean?" David demanded.

I couldn't answer that. It could mean anything. There were some funny international laws here in Antarctica. It is not up to me to criticize them; wiser men than I drafted them. There was

no sign of war here, though I will say that from the beginning the colonization of Antarctica brought a strangely intense rivalry between the nations.

Last of the continents on earth, Antarctica seemed to inspire the world's cupidity. A God-forsaken place to live, but there was undoubtedly tremendous potential wealth here, in the whaling, the fisheries, and the mines. It was the last storehouse of the world's wealth, and its exploration fired every nation into activity. There was Great Britain's clash with Chile in 1943, for instance. That is a matter of history now. And because, by what freak of diplomatic reasoning no one can fathom, the United States chose to consider that the Monroe Doctrine must be enforced even in Antarctica, it brought us into serious dispute with the British. But there was no war; and Chile undoubtedly was wrong anyway.

"War?" David demanded.

"He didn't say war. He said she was coming from the United States War Department."

It might be trouble with the Antarctic natives. Unlike the Eskimos, the nomad Antarticans seemed hostile. They had a government of a sort, but little was known of it—and no civilized nation had as yet recognized it.

War? But it was all driven from my mind by the realization that Helga was here in this storm. The plane was coming, fighting its way toward us; with luck, Clarke had said, it ought to reach us by 1 A.M.

Luck? If it didn't turn back, or get forced down, with luck it might get through.

David growled. "Why in hell could that fool girl be coming down here, on official business of the War Department?"

There was no room in my thoughts for such a question. I could only envisage the flyer caught in the black polar night in this mad whirl of storm—with Helga aboard.

Helga Johnson, David's friend. Like ourselves, she was another orphan; like us also in her flair for adventure. Her father had been a polar explorer, and, I understood vaguely, an inventor. He had been lost in the Antarctic with the ill-fated Blakely expedition, eight years ago. Helga was a strangely capable, self-reliant girl of twenty, of a sort that only this era of youthful achievement could produce. A good pal, David called her. But she was more than that, infinitely more than that, to me. For though we had never openly spoken of it, we had looked into each other's eyes and knew that some day we would bring to one another the fulfilled romance of all our dreams.

I sat stricken. Helga, caught tonight in the freezing grip of this blizzard!

CHAPTER II.

"THIS ENEMY!"

THAT was a terrible two hours I put in from eleven to one that night. I did not dare leave my instrument; but something was wrong with it; I couldn't bring in anything. The blizzard howled as badly as ever. The snow was a smother of murk, roaring almost horizontally against our buildings on the wings of a wind well over a hundred miles an hour.

David was all over the place on scores of duties. When we heard that the ship was coming through, he routed out the men. There were some ten long low buildings in the station group. Even in good weather the peaks of

their roofs were only a little above the level of the packed snow blanket. Cañon paths connected them. The paths were filled now, and the men wallowed through them. The mess hall, on the southern side, was buried completely in a twenty-foot soft drift, with only its heated chimney sticking up. David got through to it with the electric hand plow. But the opened path was gone again in a moment.

He came into me. His furs were solid with snow, he flung back his *parka* and stamped.

"What a night. Anything doing, Joe?"

"No."

The cold radiating from him sent a chill over the little room. I shivered; but it was from fear. "No. Out of business."

"Ralston's got a crew trying to get to the aerial. It may be down—I'm having all the outside connections tested. Do the best I can, Joe."

"If that ship goes down and they try to call us, helpless out there . . ."

He stood staring at me. "I know. I've got the lights going on the field yet. But you can't tell where it begins or ends—you can barely see the lights at fifty feet."

A man came to my door. "Cook says there's hot coffee ready in the mess if you want it."

"Right, Swenson, thank you. Bring some in here for Welch, and a sandwich. Joe, if we should hear from them—if they're fallen—"

"What would you go out with? The motor sled?"

To go into the open in a storm like this seemed almost suicidal. He did not answer me. He demanded: "What time is it?"

"Twelve thirty."

"By one o'clock, Clarke said.

They'll get through, Joe. If it's a government plane it's likely to be pretty airworthy, and skillfully handled. But we've got to keep the lights going."

He turned away. At the door he flung back at me: "Keep at it. If anything's wrong here, we'll fix it—you might bring a call in any time."

Twelve thirty. My coffee arrived, but I barely tasted it. Twelve forty-five. The accursed phone remained dead. In my fancy I could see the plane, with Helga, out there bucking this blast of wind. If they had any sense they'd descend. But where? How could any plane come down with even decent safety in that tumbled isolation of ice crags and glaciers which lay between here and the Barrier? They wouldn't dare come down. Or if they did? If they slid into some soft drift, or smashed in some crevice of naked ice? Lying there to be buried by the new snow in an hour. Without the radio phone, how could we ever find them?

DAVID poked his head in. "Nothing, Joe?"

"No."

"Your connections are all right. Keep trying. No sign outside. But the lights are all going and everything's ready. The beacons on the trail are burning; that would guide them."

I said vaguely: "Maybe they turned back. Might be back at Little America by now."

"Yes, true enough. I hope so."

He left me again. One o'clock. Then, after an eternity, one thirty.

I caught a signal. My heart was smothering me as I went after it.

From the plane. A distress call! Longitude one hundred and sixty degrees. Yes, that was fair enough—on the established, lighted course directly

between us and the Ross Sea Station. Then I heard the voice!

"Longitude one hundred and sixty degrees, on the trail. A beacon near us."

I cursed. Damn fool, why couldn't he tell the latitude?

I shouted into the sender. "Where are you? Latitude what?"

"Down—this enemy—longitude one hundred and sixty degrees—latitude about eighty-five degrees, thirty-two minutes."

We were eighty-five degrees, forty minutes! Only a few miles from us!

"Down—brought down by this enemy—help!"

The signals died. I leaped to my feet; rushed off for David. The words were ringing in my head. "Down—brought down by this enemy—help!"

This enemy! That didn't mean the blizzard. Enemy? Who would dare attack a plane bearing the United States mails? Certainly no civilized government. Bandits then. There was rumored to be a band of international outlaws in the mountains of Antarctica. Renegades, escaped criminals from many nations, hiding here, ruling the ignorant natives. There was said to be a "White Chief" of them. There were many tales of him—a sort of super modern Robin Hood, hiding here and calling himself ruler of Antarctica. I had never taken much stock in this; a plane could be lost in a storm, and people with too much imagination would blame it on the outlaws. But now?

"This enemy." Did that mean the White Bandit?

IT was incredibly ominous, out in the blackness of the storm. We did not dare launch a plane; we started north through the surface snow, some

twenty of us. With the wind at our backs and the light of the tank in front, the dogs followed in our track docilely enough.

David and I were alone, running with an empty, ballasted sled. My heart held a prayer that it might bring back Helga.

The tank lumbered directly in front of us. We followed the established beacon-lighted trail; it was basically some twenty feet wide, and fairly straight and level, with a hard packed surface at its bottom. There was a smother of new snow on it now. The tank plowed its way through, its motor flinging up a white cloud that gleamed in the tank's searchlight. If it could hold the trail, all right; once off it, the tank was helpless.

We struggled forward for what might have been a mile. The light of the first trail-beacon came into sight in the driving murk ahead of us. The wind ripped and tore at our backs, an incredibly piercing blast; to turn and face it and draw a breath was impossible. It flung us forward. I recall vaguely thinking: "How can we face it to go back?"

We passed the beacon. The tank went into a twenty-foot drift, but got through. We fought our way after it, while the frightened dogs, for all their training, tangled themselves up and all but floundered into the yawning tumbled crags beside us.

Another mile. The trail wound up through a frozen mountain pass with the wind howling like a demon through it and the tank almost buried in the drifts. Then we came out again upon the ice cap of the upper plateau, where the wind caught us full, and the ice was, in places, swept clean as polished marble. A numb, narcotic struggle. I found my thoughts in a dull whirl of

chaos. This gray-black whirling void, which was the world, stinging, nipping, biting at me, flinging me about, numbing my senses until it was all dream-like, confused.

The beacons went past. We had figured that the fallen plane could not be more than ten miles from the station, perhaps even less. "This enemy!" The words echoed through my dulled mind. We were all armed.

David shouted at me; the wind tore at his words and flung them away; even the roaring of the tank was lost; we could see the blue-yellow spit of its exhaust, but hear nothing. David gestured off into the swirling darkness beside us. But there was nothing to see, and in a moment he stepped from the sled on which he had been riding and wallowed on beside me.

And then the accursed tank went astray and plunged nose down into a crevice. They couldn't back it out. Its crew came ruefully from the cabin and we left it, with its gleaming searchlight slanting drunkenly up into the void.

Another half mile. David shouted suddenly: "Joe, look up there! That is one of the blue blizzards now."

A flash of tiny blue lightning stabbed through the murk of the sky. It was incredibly ominous—weird, almost supernatural. Lightning was rational to a summer thunderstorm of the tropics; but down here in the polar winter night it was uncanny.

There was only one flash.

A beacon came at last in sight to guide us, but we knew that the floundering, frightened dogs could not go much farther. A dozen times we had been off the trail and floundered back again. David and I were leading. He suddenly seized me; we brought the sled to a stop; the sleds behind us came

lurching up into a tangle of dogs and men. We huddled in the trail.

WE could all see it, off to one side in the dull glow of the near-by beacon—the fallen plane. It seemed uninjured. It lay on an ice hummock from which with luck it might even have taken off. The drift snow was piling over it, rounding the sharpness of its outlines.

But there was no sign of any one there. A small cabin light was still burning.

We started forward again. Abreast of the plane we stopped; it was a hundred feet to one side of us.

From somewhere in the howling darkness a moving light showed. I remember my impression that it was large and far away. No! Close and small, a blue spot of light. I suddenly became aware that all around us, as we huddled in the center of the trail, blue spots of light were moving. Then I saw a figure—human—a man!

Instant impressions. We were taken wholly by surprise. An impression of horror at something almost uncanny. Men surrounding us—men out here in this storm who were not dressed in furs, but in a garment of white, like ice, or snow. Ghostly figures—but they were solid enough; one leaped upon me, seized me.

We were all struggling in the grip of them. One of our men fired a shot; then another. I saw the spurts of flame, heard the shots dimly as the wind ripped the sound away.

David was gone from me. Then I saw his huge figure fighting with a cluster of white shapes around him. His automatic spat. One of his assailants fell. But the rest bore him down. I caught a glimpse of a man's face close to mine. His arms were holding

me as I fought to get out my automatic.

Something struck me. I staggered. Then fell from another blow. The weight of a man was on me as my senses faded.

CHAPTER III.

OUTLAWED ANTARCTICANS.

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was lying in a cabin. It seemed to be in movement. I opened my eyes to a dim blue glow. I was lying on something soft and white. The white concave walls of a small room were over me like a vault. There were windows, with a dark blur outside them. A sweep of movement, and I realized that this was the cabin of a large plane in which I was lying.

I shifted to one elbow. My furs were still on me. My head was roaring, but I seemed unhurt. The taste in my mouth and a vague chemical odor clinging to me, made me think that I had been drugged.

A whisper sounded in my ear, David's voice. "Joe."

I rolled over. David was sitting beside me. "They said you'd be all right, Joe. Easy! Don't call out."

I stammered: "Why—what has—"

"You were drugged. They knocked us out. Easy, now, there's a dozen of them within hearing."

The room was chill, and fairly silent save for an outside whirl of wind and a murmuring hum of the motors. I saw an archway leading to another small interior beyond, glowing with cold blue light. The white forms of men moved about in there.

I was fully conscious now. A hand touched my face, lightly as a caress. Helga leaned down over me!

"Joe!"

Helga, safe! I seized her hand; I sat up and found her sitting with David beside me. Helga, not in polar furs, but in a modish blue cloak, with an incongruous aviator's helmet.

David explained quickly. "Took only us alive.. Killed all our men, and the crew of Helga's plane."

I sat tense, confused, listening to what they had to tell me. The plane, not unduly in distress from the storm, had been flying low, trying to follow the beacon trail. A blue stab of light had come up, caught it.

"Brought us down," Helga whispered. "We came down, and all in a moment we were set upon, as you were. Our operator stuck to his phone—and then they rushed in, and killed him there."

"They? Who?" I demanded.

"Bandits," whispered David. "Oh, they exist, right enough! The White Bandits!"

We sat whispering in the swaying, blue-lighted cabin. My gaze clung to Helga's solemn, intent face; and then wandered to the archway beyond which the white, ghostly shapes of our captors were visible. One came to the arch and gazed in at us.

A man's figure, short and heavy set. A white garment clung closely about him; he had a round, bullet head of close-clipped white hair. The light glinted blue on his peering eyes. He turned back into the other room.

I realized that these white garments of our captors were the Perez insulated fabrics. It was used in the polar zones, particularly by the Latins, who disliked furs.

Helga was whispering: "Get your wits, Joe. They drugged you. Are you all right?"

"Yes. Helga, what—"

David whispered: "She was coming down to study the blue storms, Joe."

I have mentioned that Helga's father had been an inventor. Helga seldom spoke of him. She grew up, with her flair for science, studying meteorology, as her father evidently had before her. And at seventeen she had received a surprisingly responsible position in the United States Meteorological Bureau near Washington.

SHE cut in on David now. I listened, amazed at her vehement words. There was a driving energy in the make-up of Helga Johnson.

"The blue storms of Antarctica, Joe, are unnatural."

Unnatural? Heaven knows they seemed so. I had only actually seen one of them—a gray-black cloud, with swinging wind and heavy snowfall, and blue lightning darting through the cloud. Unnatural!

"Not the storms of nature, Joe. Man-made storms! Artificial. They told me I was crazy in Washington when I suggested it two years ago. But they gave me a laboratory and assistants. And last week we made one of the storms in miniature!"

David said: "Here in Antarctica, some one is influencing the weather."

"But who?" I demanded again. "And why?"

"The outlaws; these bandits, wouldn't you say so? The White Chief—Robin Hood—call him what you will. The Antarcticans, if you like; those fellows."

He gestured to the adjoining cabin. He added:

"Why? Why influence the weather? To keep our nations out of here. Drive us out; keep out our encroaching colonies. This is 1960, Joe. The Indians of North America tried to do it with

tomahawks and bows and arrows. But this is 1960."

And I had always sneered at the tales of White Bandits!

I whispered: "But why attack us? Or Helga?"

I understood it, though vaguely, even before she answered. She had discovered the secret of the blue storms.

She said: "I sent you a message, Joe, on the short wave, but you didn't get it. Like a fool, I signed my name and mentioned the blue blizzards. It must have been intercepted. They're after me. Oh, you needn't think we're dealing just with ignorant Antarctic savages. They've got a ruler—a white man of scientific knowledge."

"And the scum of half a dozen nations," David put in. "Escaped criminals. A lot of them are Chileans; or anyway, they speak Spanish."

"And English," said Helga. "That fellow there in the archway speaks Spanish and English—he was in here a while ago."

The white figure was still lurking there, as though trying to overhear us, and watching us. I fumbled for my automatic; it was gone. The fellow in the archway suddenly advanced and stood over us. I saw him now as a man of indeterminate middle age, short and heavy set. The white garment clung close to him. A jacket, and a skirt. The skirt was tight, but it stretched with the movement of his legs. His feet were encased in white fur shoes. His head of close-clipped black hair was bare; but there was a white hood, thrown back, dangling from his shoulders.

Helga said suddenly: "You're the one who speaks English, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing with us?"

He grinned. "You are Helga Johnson. And you are Joseph Welch—and you, David Dragon. We do not make a mistake." He spoke English with a Spanish accent. But he was fluent.

David said: "That's who we are. Who are you? What do you want of us? You're a Chilean, aren't you?"

The man struck his chest. "I am Ramón Margones, Antarctic, as you call our country. Naina ordered me to bring you."

THERE was a brief silence. "Why?" demanded Helga. "I suppose you realize you've murdered Americans. You've attacked the flag of the United States."

He did not answer.

"Who is Naina?" I demanded.

"Naina, a white girl, daughter of the White Chief who now is dead."

He gazed down at us contemplatively. The blue light fell full on his face. Swarthy skin; dark eyes; a high-bridged nose; a blue stubble of beard on his heavy jowls. An evil-looking scoundrel.

He said at last: "It is not for you to question me. *Si vosotros queréis*—"

"Talk English," said David.

The bandit grinned again. "You are people of spirit. But you of the red head do not speak?"

I said: "I can speak right enough. You've murdered twenty of our people; how is it you didn't murder us three also?"

He waved that away. "*Si vosotros queréis*—if you wish to look out of the window—"

"Thanks," said Helga dryly. She stood up. Drawn to her full height, Helga was not over five feet two inches. A compact, sturdy little body, perfect always in health and strength. She fronted the Antarctic. "You

think we ought to be afraid of you, but we're not."

"No," he said. "I notice that you are not." He gazed down upon her with an obvious admiration—a look on his face that set my heart pounding. I had cause afterward to recall that look.

David said: "Where are we? You can at least tell us that?"

"We are in the mountains of the Weddell Quadrant."

A region least known to-day of all this vast white continent. The Weddell Mountains, some of our charts called it—a tumbled, mountainous area, lying at a general altitude of fifteen thousand feet; the stormiest, coldest, most inaccessible region remaining upon earth. No nation as yet had claimed it.

Margones added: "You question too freely. We will reach the white valley presently. I will call you."

He turned and left us, grotesque in the white flexible skirt clinging to his legs.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISONER IN THE CLIFF HOUSE.

WE stood at the window. I had opportunity now to notice more of the details of this plane. There was nothing remarkable about it. A Gorgsky body of the triplane model, rather an out-of-date affair now; a huge body of the style most popular in the early 1950's. It seemed in good mechanical condition; the thrum of its muffled motors was dimly audible to us. But in the cabin there were signs of its age—and looking out the glassite window I could see one of the wings, where it had been crudely patched.

I whispered to David and Helga: "Where did they get this ship, do you suppose?"

David shrugged. "Stole it. Years ago, by the look of it."

Helga looked at us. "The Blakely expedition had a plane like this."

"Look outside," David interrupted. "The blue lightning!"

Along the bulging white side of the cabin, up ahead by the motors, a sudden flash of blue light stabbed into the polar night. A silent flash; it was repeated once or twice, then gone. I saw white swirls of vapor rolling sluggishly aside from where it had been—rolling like the white bow-wave from a speeding ship. Liquid air, or something akin to it, congealed by the cold of the blue light-ray.

"That's what brought down our plane," said Helga, "and killed our men when it struck them. This plane is equipped to create the blue storms, Joe. We worked on the principle in a small way in Washington."

"Easy, Helga," David cautioned. It seemed that the fellow Margones was listening to us. Helga changed at once. She said, casually: "How high up are we, can you tell?"

A thousand feet or so below us a white landscape was slipping past. There were peaks of ghostly white mountains down there, a cataclysm of jagged ice peaks; glaciers; darkly white mountain passes, solid with drift snow; or again, an open spread of ice cap plateau; undulating like a storm-swept sea suddenly congealed into frozen immobility; and great valleys, depressed a thousand feet, white-rimmed, gray-black in their depths.

All was ghostly down there as a dream of frozen, silent desolation. I tried to gauge our height and the visible movement of the surface and thus

determine our speed. It seemed that we were flying fairly fast; three hundred miles an hour possibly.

We had passed now beyond the region of the blizzard. It was not snowing outside. Leaden clouds swept overhead; but they were broken, and occasionally the brilliant frosty stars showed behind them.

How long we stood silent at the window I cannot say. No more than half an hour, doubtless.

The sky was clearing; the clouds gleaming upon the silent blue-white mountains beneath us. The mountains seemed reaching ever higher. We ourselves were ascending. Twenty thousand feet? I think so. Certainly there were peaks higher than that, in a hugely towering mountain ridge. We swept over it. I saw the heights extending in each direction to the distant purple horizon where the stars hung like fallen gems. Vast sierras, these towering mountains. It seemed that the ridge curved slightly—as though this were some small segment of a huge circle.

WE crossed low over the heights. On the inner side the mountains dropped sheer, almost perpendicular, down into a gray purple darkness. A caldron here, in depth five thousand feet at least beneath its encircling rim. We could barely see its bottom—a gray-white, almost level spread. It was a huge, circular valley.

"The Valley of Drift-Snow." It is on our present-day charts, with the name the Antarcticans gave it. Its almost level bottom, crossed in a few places by small, ragged uplands, lies at the thirteen-thousand-foot altitude, with a rim of mountain heights towering everywhere some five to ten thousand feet higher.

Helga murmured: "We're descending."

We were slackening and dropping rapidly downward. The blue stabs of light outside were extinguished. A white searchlight showed from the bow of our ship. It swung into the starlight, then downward.

There was a line of ragged broken hills under us, a volcanic-looking region full of pits and craters, congealed with frozen masses of ice and snow.

We dropped in a spiral over a white cañon. Upon its floor I saw human habitations—a little huddled group of domed ice huts, with tunneled paths in the snow pack between them; and a few huts that seemed of timber, miscellaneous driftwood, with skins and furs covering the wooden frames into a semblance of dwelling places.

A forlorn Antarctic settlement. A thousand people or less might be here, ignorant, half savage natives. There are many such groups of nomads in the desolate interior of Antarctica. But this village, we saw at once, was different. There were a few lights here—not tallow or burning oil, but battery lights of the modern Ashtakon storage batteries. And there was this plane we were in—we saw now its landing field, with crude old-fashioned floodlights. Forlorn, but fairly modern. And off to one side was what seemed the entrance to a cavern in the side of the cañon. This was lighted; and as we came nearer I could see figures passing in and out of it.

A strange mixture of broken-down, scientific modernity was mingled here with the savagery of the native Antarctic. A bandit's camp. We saw the same mixture in the people who crowded around the plane when we landed. Men, women and children, most of them the heavy-featured, high

cheek-boned, slant-eyed type of natives. They were garbed in polar furs, the women wearing ornamental belts. Mingled with them were others dressed in the Perez white fabric giving insulation against the cold.

They all crowded us, jabbering in the guttural native language. But there was a mixture of English and Spanish with it. And there were some evil-looking fellows like Margones—renegades from South America, doubtless. One of them flung a coarse remark at Helga and plucked at her. I shoved him off.

"Let us alone, damn you!"

Margones waved them away. "Come," he ordered us.

We shoved through the crowd. The Antarcticans were small people, and so were most of the bandits. David towered like a giant among them.

"This way," said Margones. He led us toward the cave mouth. A man stopped us; an Antarctic. Margones jabbered at him, and he let us pass.

WE entered the tunnel. The air was at once warmer—stale, but there was a current of it coming out. We went back perhaps a hundred feet. The tunnel opened into a cavern. Lights were here, showing a few stone huts that were built on the cavern floor. We passed them and turned to the wall. Polar dogs crowded around us—there had been some outside, but there seemed many more of them in here. Sleds and other polar equipment were standing about.

"This way," Margones said again.

The perpendicular wall of the cavern had lighted windows in it. A single large dwelling was cut here in the cliff face—a doorway at the bottom; two stories of window, with a crude wooden balcony at the top story. It looked

something like a house of the cliff-dwelling Indians of Arizona and New Mexico.

A guard was at the doorway. We passed him and entered a dimly lighted corridor. Margones pushed us always ahead of him. There had been no opportunity for resistance even if it had been practical, which it was not. We were unarmed; and Margones had what I assumed was a cylinder weapon of the blue-ray. It was clipped to his belt; and in his hand now he flourished a new modern-looking automatic.

The interior of this cliff house was surprisingly spacious. We passed arches giving on interior rooms, all dimly blue-white. Down a narrow flight of steps—ice blocks and stone set in a narrow incline.

The lower corridor was narrow. The air was warmer, and in one place almost fetid.

David said sharply: "Where are you taking us?"

"To wait for Naina," Margones retorted. "She sends for you presently."

He stopped at a door. It was the first metal I had seen, a metallic door set in a metal frame. Margones fumbled at it, pushed it open. He shoved us. David resisted; then yielded with a shrug. A current of fresher air was coming out.

The door clanged behind us; Margones was gone.

We were in a small stone room. A rug of fur was on its floor. Furniture of stone: chairs, a couch, a table with a shaded light.

A man stood by the table. A thin, erect figure dressed in trousers and a shirt of crudely fashioned skins. The light gleamed on his sparse gray hair and his thin face. A prisoner here in this cliff dungeon.

He stood trembling, gazing at us.

Then I became aware that it was Helga at whom he was gazing. And that she was standing stricken, staring at him. She had been twelve years old when she had last seen him. Now he gazed at this grown young woman. He stammered: "Why—why, Helga, my little girl—so grown!"

"Father—father dear!"

She ran into the shelter of his trembling, eager arms.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT JOHNSON TOLD.

IT is not my part to attempt a detailed record of this reunion between Helga and her father. Their emotion was something into which David and I could not intrude. I had always known Helga as a girl of utter self-reliance, with a dominant, purposeful energy characteristic of one far beyond her years. Fearless, with a breezy, direct manner at times almost masculine. Yet she could be tender, too; gently feminine—ah, I had seen that mood, and upon it were built my dreams of what might be for her and me. She sat now beside her father, with her arms around him. They whispered.

I heard him say: "Such a big girl, Helga. Why, you're beautiful. And—you tell me your dear mother is dead . . . You remembered me all these years, Helga. Tell me, now, more about your mother."

There were tears in Helga's eyes, a catch of sobbing in her voice as she answered him. David and I turned away.

We were here in this room no more than an hour; but many strange things the captive Johnson had to tell us.

The Blakely expedition had been attacked without warning by the

bandits. The Antarcticans took only Johnson and five of his companions alive.

"Brought us here," he said. "Eight years is a long time. I have been prisoner."

He spoke with a drab, weary voice; he passed a hand across his eyes, looked up at us and smiled gently. A smile so like Helga's!

"I get confused, talking again to my own people. Five of our men; they have all died since."

I said, "Is this Naina ruler of these people? The fellow that took us spoke of her."

"Yes, she is the ruler. Her father—they called him the White Chief—is dead. And she commands now. Just a girl like you, Helga; a girl hardly as old as you are."

I can only sketch this hour's talk we had with Johnson. A furtiveness was presently upon us. We were all prisoners here, unarmed, behind a barred door. Johnson said one of the bandits undoubtedly was on guard outside, perhaps within hearing.

We spoke softly, guardedly. With the emotion of Helga's unexpected reunion with her father past, we told Johnson all we could of outside conditions. He had been shut off from the world for eight years; that is a long time, here in Antarctica. Eight years had brought many changes.

The members of the Blakely expedition had been found by a rescuing party apparently frozen. One plane was missing, and six of the men. The world called it a disaster; there was no thought then of bandits.

Johnson told us of this "White Chieftain." He was, or had been, an American; a man of sixty-odd. A renegade; a fugitive, perhaps.

Johnson said, "He is dead now—

died of heart failure last year. A strange fellow. A man of intelligence and of scientific knowledge. He came down here, gathered the natives together, and became their chief. He hated the United States with a deadly hatred. I'll tell you about that presently."

NAINA was his daughter; her mother, who had died years ago, was a native woman, strangely white, like an albino. Her father, dying, had bequeathed his hatred of America to his daughter.

"About the blue storms," Helga began. She told her father how, in Washington, she had been able to work out the secret of them. David and I listened, amazed; we found we had known so little of Helga!

When Helga was a child, Johnson had been working on the theories of weather control; he had discovered the blue ray, and Helga, at twelve years old, had known of it. As she grew up she had followed in her father's path, to rediscover what had seemed lost by his death.

He said to David and me, "I had kept it secret, but I had the apparatus with the Blakely expedition. We were going to test it out down here; and then we were captured. This white ruler—he was named Roberts—made me explain its workings. I did that, or he would have killed me. He has used it to make the weather of Antarctica worse than it really is. He has kept many exploring expeditions from this region here. They start this way, but always a blizzard turns them back. Occasionally he made a raid. I suppose he must have known of Helga."

"The White Bandit, we call him," I said. We explained what we knew of the vague tales.

"Yes," said Johnson, "I have heard him say with pride that he was known as the White Bandit. Well, he has kept up a semblance of government here. He has stolen supplies—he has just the one airplane, and a radiophone receiving apparatus. The struggle for existence here—"

He sketched how they had lived: hunting the polar animals in the summer, stealing food and ammunition from the colonial settlements, occasionally raiding an exploring party, appropriating its instruments, supplies, and equipment. Strange conditions, in the colonization of a new continent! Only our modern world of 1960 could produce them.

I said, "And this man Margones, these South Americans?"

Johnson lowered his voice. "They are Chileans." He rose and went to the door. It was locked on the outside. He listened, and then came back to us.

He half whispered, "This Margones, of them all, I fear most. He joined us two years ago, he and about twenty of his band. The Chilean Antarctic colony of Santiago Pequeño isn't far from here—only about three hundred miles."

Chile had a colony stretching to the coast; the principal settlement was called Santiago Pequeño. Margones and his fellows had evidently come from there.

"They joined Naina's father," said Johnson. "Protesting loyalty—but they have no loyalty to any one. A band of cutthroats." He lowered his voice still further. "There is gold in the mountains here. I'll tell you presently. But what I mean, I think Margones figures that Naina may know where it is. She doesn't; she isn't interested. But I know."

"You?" murmured David.

"Yes. But let's not talk of that now. Margones and his band are after it. Perhaps there is Chilean capital ready to finance them. If they could locate it, and plant the Chilean flag—"

HE broke off. He put his thin hands on David's arm; he was so slender and frail a man beside David's powerful figure. He added, "You give me new courage. We've got to escape from here. They'll take you in to Naina presently—"

David burst out, "You've told us a lot, and yet it seems so little! What does Naina want of us?"

Johnson did not know. He said, "She is a strange character, this white girl. Her father was more than a little demented, it seemed to me, obsessed with hatred for his native United States. And Naina, born and brought up here, knows no other emotion; her ruling passion is that of hatred. She's doing what she thinks her dead father would want her to do; and being a woman, she goes to extremes." He smiled. He added slowly, "I think she plans now to attack the United States, through the United States colony here, the village of Little America."

"Attack it?" I gasped.

"Yes. With what she calls her nation—a thousand or fifteen hundred people; that's all there are here, struggling for a bare existence, possessing a few rifles and automatics, not much ammunition, sleds and dogs, and that one airplane."

"But that's crazy," David protested.

"Yes. But she has the blue ray—I had with Blakely about forty hand projectors, and the weather control mechanism, which is in the plane. Crazy to attack a civilized nation? Of course it is! But you'll hear her talk.

She's going to drive the United States out of Antarctica! Well, she might even do that, temporarily. Bring death to Little America."

He stared at us with his somber sunken eyes. "Extraordinary character, this Naina. So beautiful, so young a girl, trained from birth into a warped and twisted humanity. It's just a little pathetic."

A footstep sounded outside the door; a hand was on the lock. Johnson gripped us.

"Margones coming. Say nothing of all this; and be careful—don't anger Naina."

The door was opening. Johnson whispered hurriedly, "Watch your chance. If we can get out of here, get back to civilization— You give me new courage; I have been imprisoned here so long, alone."

Margones came in. He eyed us shrewdly.

"You have been planning how to escape from us? *Verdad?* And telling

to each other your troubles? *Bueno!* That is what Naina wanted. It will save her much to explain. She will see you now." He added curtly, "The little girl can stay with you, Johnson. Naina say she is your daughter."

"Yes," said Johnson.

The bandit stood looking down at Helga. She stared up at him, frowning defiance; and again on his face I saw that leer of admiration which made me shudder.

He turned abruptly away; he said, "Come, *señores.*"

He barred the door upon Helga and her father. He led David and me along the dim corridor; up a winding underground staircase. Along another, larger tunnel passage.

We emerged at last into a cavelike blue-white room; into the presence of Naina. She whom ever afterward I thought of as the Snow Girl. Frozen beauty. Maiden carved in marble. Incredibly beautiful. Incredibly inhuman!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



"So you dare disobey me!"

The Snow Girl

Queen of a mysterious Antarctic kingdom, Naina threatens the intrepid polar flyers Dragon and Welch with her coldly implacable power

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE WELCH, who is telling the story, is radio man at the Trans-polar air line's station a few hundred miles from the South Pole, in 1960. He and David Dragon go out in a blizzard to hunt for a special War Department plane.

They are seized by Antarctic bandits armed with a strange blue light-ray, and taken with Helga Johnson, from the wrecked plane, to the distant village of the bandits.

The bandits are renegades who had been assembled by the "White Chief-

tain," one Roberts, who had passed on his hatred of the United States to his daughter Naina. Upon his death she succeeded to the rule over the bandits and a thousand or more Antarctic natives. With her blue ray, which creates terrible "blue blizzards," she plans to wipe out the American polar colonies, such as Byrd's Little America.

At the city inside the cliff, Helga finds her lost father, inventor of the blue ray, who had been captured from an exploring party by Naina's father.

Ramón Margones, a Chilean pirate

who is secretly seeking the gold in the mountains of Antarctica, takes Joe and David Dragon before the ruler, Naina.

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCESS OF ANTARCTICA.

SHE lay upon her couch in a white robe diaphanous as though the cold could not touch her. The couch was of a soft white fabric, with pillows of blue-white, smooth as velvet. It stood upon a small, upraised stone platform. A pale-blue canopy was over it; a soft illumination of blue-white light fell upon the reclining figure, and on trappings that might have graced the throne-room of a fabled Oriental princess.

She raised herself indolently on one elbow as we entered. Margones pushed us forward. He knelt at the steps of the dais, but David and I stood erect, staring. Vision of girlhood, inconceivably beautiful! As Helga Johnson's father had said, she was no more than a girl, this Naina. Twenty years old at the most. A girl, slim but rounded into maturity.

Yet as I stared, and she stared indolently back at us, she seemed unreal. A statue of ice. But not that either, for through the filmy draperies her figure gleamed like cold pink marble. Long, pale-golden hair lay in frozen waves on her breast. A face, chiseled by a sculptor of divine genius into a beauty incredibly perfect.

The illusion broke. She moved the pink marble of her limbs. A flush of deeper red came to her cheeks. Her sensuous lips parted; her eyes, pale-blue, narrowed, and darkened until they were almost black.

No statue of ice this, but a human girl, hot with anger.

She spoke; a sharp, imperious question. "You do not kneel?"

I said, "No. Should we? Sorry."

I plucked at David. He was standing drawn to his full height. He had thrown back his hood. His lips were parted with fast-surging breath. Young giant, perfection of youthful strength and rugged masculine beauty. He stood gazing with his soul in his eyes, emotion-swept, oblivious of himself. At his sides his great fists were clenched, as though subconsciously he felt that this vision of imperious beauty were a challenge to his manhood.

"David!" I twitched his sleeve. "David, kneel down!"

We knelt together on the step, but David's head was up, and his gaze unwavering.

Naina gestured with a slim, pink-white arm. We stood up.

She said:

"Leave them with me, Margones. Wait outside my door. I will call when I want you."

The bandit turned and went out of the room. He was grinning as though amused at this girl ruler whose whims he was humoring for his own purposes. We sat, as Naina commanded, on the steps at her feet. She had not moved; she still reclined on one elbow, propped by the blue-white cushions, regarding us contemplatively. David was nearest to her, within reach of her hand.

She said, and now her anger was gone and she spoke quietly:

"I put you with Johnson. No doubt he told you my plans."

I hesitated. David said, "Yes, he did."

"Quite so. To save me words. This is the time for action, not words. That little girl who in her radio messages signed herself Helga Johnson—that is his daughter?"

"Yes," said David again.

"I thought so."

SHE regarded David impersonally. "You stare at me?" A glint of amusement came into the blue depths of her eyes. "You have the weakness of all men."

Contempt was in her voice—contempt for this passion of men which made woman's beauty a thing of allure. Contempt for love, so remote from her whom obviously it had never touched.

David said abruptly, "What do you want with us?"

She raised her eyebrows. "That little girl Helga knows too much about my blue ray weapons. I shall keep her here as I have kept her father. I was going to send you to Little America, to tell them what they must do."

Her eyes darkened again; upon her whole face lay the dark shadow of her hatred. "Your United States!" She said it with a breathless, smoldering passion. "I have had enough of your nation's insolence. This is my land, not yours."

She checked herself suddenly. "You keep on staring at me, David Dragon! I think now I will not send you with my message, but keep you here with me."

At David's expression, she repeated, "Keep you here with me. Is that so terrible a fate? I will treat you kindly. You will learn to serve me, to be loyal, to love Antarctica and me."

It seemed that David started; I saw that his fists were still clenched. On Naina's face there was a fleeting, sardonic look of amusement.

"Oh. Yes," said David at last, "I see."

Naina added contemplatively as though he had not spoken:

"I think that this little red-headed fellow can take my message. I am go-

ing to send you to tell them that they must abandon Little America. Leave it—get out of here, out of my country. You seem intelligent, Joe Welch."

I retorted, "Too intelligent to take any message like that. You don't know what you—"

Her smile stopped me. She made no gesture. A smile of such calm, cold confidence that it seemed almost incredible.

"Perhaps they will be more intelligent than you. If they yield at once, it would spare them tragedy. I won't have them here!"

The calmness of her voice suddenly broke. "My—my father hated them. I hate them—I won't have them here! You think, and they think, because they are a big, powerful nation that they can defy me. Because I am only the daughter of the White Bandit. They shall see I am more than that. Ruler of Antarctica—and they're on my land. I've had enough of their insolence, you understand?"

It was a wild, half-hysterical outburst. From a man, one would have thought it irrational; but from this girl, knowing what we knew of her—it was, as Johnson had said, a little pathetic. David stood silently staring. I said gently:

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'm going to take you in my airplane to Little America. I will circle overhead and send you down in a volplane. You will tell them that they must darken all their lights as a signal to me that they have yielded. I want them then to abandon the settlement—to leave Antarctica and the stations on the overland trail. I want them all abandoned. I won't have your planes flying over my country."

"Suppose they won't agree to do all that?" I suggested.

"Then I will kill them, drive them out. Just because they are a big nation and I am small, I won't tolerate their insolence!"

I THINK that in spite of myself, there may have been amusement in my eyes. Or perhaps it was pity. Whatever it was, I think that she saw it. And there must have sprung within her the desire to show us her power. She called suddenly:

"Margones!"

He stood in the doorway behind us. "*Señorita?*"

"That fellow who disobeyed me yesterday, and whom I promised punishment—have they brought him?"

"I think so, *señorita*. I will see."

Margones bowed with a graceful, sweeping gesture. His ironic eyes met mine; and I felt it was he whom we had to fear, far more than this headstrong girl. He said deferentially,

"May I suggest a thing, *señorita?*"

"What is it? Speak out."

"I have heard what you say to these Americanos. I think I would not make war upon these Yankee pigs—not just now. There is a thing better that we can do." He ignored her flush of anger. "May I lock them up now and talk to you, alone?"

She repeated impatiently, "What is it? They can hear—I have nothing to hide."

"True," he said. "Well, it is this. I think that this girl Helga Johnson is very important in Washington. If you send this Joe Welch to Little America to tell them we are holding her here, that we will kill her unless they send us much gold, it might be arranged, *señorita*. She is official in Washington, you told me so. She does the government work. If we tell them that the White Bandit is holding her, they per-

haps pay the ransom. A good ransom, in gold—and food and equipment also. Then if as you say she is dangerous to you, we kill her just the same, and make war upon the Yankees."

She demanded calmly, "Gold? What use have I for gold?"

"It is very nice to have, *señorita*." He bowed again, and flung David and me his ironic glance. "If we demand both food and gold, you and your people take the food—and me and my men, yes, we are satisfied with the gold."

She waved him away. "You annoy me with such plans. I will ask nothing of the Americans. Bring me that disobedient fellow for his punishment."

Margones assented. "*Sí, señorita*; I obey."

He left us. Swift thoughts leaped at me. We were alone, here in this cave room. Its white draperies of fabric shrouded windows quite near us. They were open. I glanced at one out of the tail of my eye. It seemed that we were perhaps thirty feet above the level of the cavern floor outside. Swift thoughts. If we could escape from here—

Naina moved. She sat up abruptly. Her feet came from the couch to the step beside us, feet of pink-white marble, incased in sandals. The soft fabric of her robe brushed me, and I became aware of a perfume from it—a perfume which had all this time enveloped us, but was now more intense. A wave of it flowed out, exotically alluring; yet I knew that a little more might steal my senses. In her hand, as it hung idly at her side, was a small white cylinder. A perceptible cold radiated from it.

She said quietly, "You think you might escape from me? Don't try it." She added, after a moment of silence,

"I will show you what punishment is—what comes to those who dare disobey me.

"My people love me; but they know I am master. I treat them kindly when they do right, and I bring swift justice to those who do wrong. Ah, you have him, Margones?"

THE bandit had already returned. There was a commotion at the door. Several Antarticans stood there waiting as Margones brought in the culprit.

Naina commanded, "Stand away, you two. You shall see now how my father taught me to rule."

I drew David aside; he was still standing staring, as though fascinated. Margones came toward us, pushing a chattering, terrified wretch before him, a small, slender Antartican native man. He wore trousers of animal skin; from the waist up he was stripped. When Margones released him he fell to the floor. Naina drew herself to her full height, gazing down imperiously upon him as he groveled at her feet. He chattered, mumbling in the native language.

"Speak English," she commanded. "I want these Americans to hear you, to see how I treat those who disobey me."

"Princess, have mercy!"

"Did you steal one of my cylinders of the blue ray—and a rifle, and the sled and dog of Umo?"

"Princess, I did."

"And were gone with them for a day?"

"Princess, my woman she is with another child. I wanted something good for her to eat. She is sick so much. I thought if I kill an animal—"

"In the winter night?"

"I thought I might. She thought if she eat some liver— Our food is so much the same—you have given us no liver for so long, princess. My woman she sick from the seal meat now, she cannot eat like the rest of us."

"I give you all good food. You knew it was forbidden for you to leave the camp?"

"Princess, yes! But I wanted—I thought—"

"And you did leave the camp?"

"Yes, but I—"

"Enough. You broke my law. You did it knowingly. You admit that?"

"Princess, yes. But—"

"Enough. You are guilty."

She stood like a statue of ice gazing down at him. Her cold white beauty was inhuman. She seemed not angry now, but white, calm and quiet. Judicial.

I gasped, "What are you going to do?"

"Be still!" snapped Margones.

At my words Naina turned and flashed me a glance. "Punish him as I would punish you for disobedience." From the couch behind her she picked up a metal handle from which dangled a length of wire. Like a long whip she lashed it tentatively in the air.

The wretch at her feet screamed, "No, princess, no!"

Abruptly David leaped forward.

"Stand back!" rasped Naina.

But he did not. Instead, he seized her by the shoulders. There was a flurry behind us where the Antarticans stood watching in the doorway. Beside me, Margones took a step; an automatic was in his hand.

But Naina's gesture waved him off. "You!" She gasped her astonishment. David's bulk towered head and shoulders above her; she was slim and small as a child beside him.

He stood gripping her, and she gazed up into his face.

"YOU dare to touch me!" She found her voice.

Her hand upraised warned Margones back. She was rigid, blazing at David; but his grasp did not relax.

I muttered, "David—"

But he did not heed me.

"Punish him," he said, "some other way. If you have to punish him."

Their glances crossed like swords. And it seemed for an instant that his will was stronger.

She gasped, "You—you are hurting me."

He dropped his hands at once. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to hurt you. There's no need to punish him. He hasn't done anything wrong."

"Hasn't he?" A fury swept her, and I knew that David had lost. "Stand away from me! Margones, take him—"

I warned sharply, "David!"

Margones and I pulled at him. He stood a head taller than either of us. As David resisted, the bandit hissed, "You fool, do you want death?"

"Easy, David!" I drew him aside. "You can't do anything."

We stood watching. Naina lashed the wire again. A current hummed in it so that it glowed with a vivid blue light.

David and I, even six feet away, could feel its stinging cold as Naina lashed it back and forth.

"Stand up!" she commanded.

But the wretch could not stand. He tried, but his shaking knees gave way. He groveled, whimpered, chattering with terror.

And then she struck him. The wire had the sting of a steel whip; its terri-

ble cold burned his flesh like fire. He screamed, and she lashed again.

"So you would dare disobey me!" She wound it around one of his arms, held it an instant, and jerked it away. The mark of it showed on his blackened, frozen flesh.

"Princess! Mercy! Have mercy!"

"Why? Why should I?"

"Princess! *Aie*, stop!"

A white mist was swirling around us. Through it the white, beautiful figure of Naina showed like an avenging fury, lashing.

The blue fire of the whip gleamed through the mist.

"Disobedient servant!"

The fellow's screams, the hiss of the wire, the snapping radiations of the frigid air, mingled in a confusion of horror. Snow in tiny, dustlike particles was falling in the room.

David jerked away from Margones.

"Naina, stop!"

The whip caught David a glancing, stinging blow. Naina held it motionless. She fronted David. Her white breast was heaving with her exertion, but she smiled calmly.

"Stand back. You are in my way."

"No!" gasped David. "Stop this. Don't torture him."

"Stand back."

"No!" David reached for the whip.

Margones was grinning. "Shall I shoot him, *señorita*?"

"No." She eyed David calmly.

"You, too, would disobey me?"

"Yes. You can't do this."

"And why not?"

"Because it's—inhuman."

"Inhuman?" She laughed. "Inhuman? What is that? This is punishment, discipline. It is what you will deserve if you annoy me further."

He said slowly, "I will not let you go on with this. I tell you to stop."

Again they crossed glances. It may have been that she felt his challenge; perhaps it held a lure for her. But she stared at him calmly.

"Stand back."

"No!"

David lost again. Angry color mounted the slender white column of her throat; her eyes flashed.

"No man dares disobey me!"

"But I dare. Give me that whip."

She lashed it at David. And as he fought to take it away from her she suddenly struck him on the head with the heavy metal handle of the whip. He fell. Margones shoved the automatic against me as I started forward. "Don't move! *Dios!* What a fool is your friend!"

The Antarcticans in the doorway came rushing forward. I was seized and jerked from the room.

The last I saw was David lying there beside the groveling wretch. Margones was grinning. And Naina stood there, gazing down at David—gazing in mute surprise at what she had done.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFERENCE IN LITTLE AMERICA.

THE governor's secretary sneered. "A somewhat fantastic story, you'll admit that, eh?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"And what are we to do; believe it?"

"I don't know; I'm telling you the truth. Believe what you like."

"We're supposed to get excited over it, eh? I'm to rush to Governor Bland with this horrible news that the United States is about to be driven out of Antarctica. And he'll radio to the President, and he'll decide that we've had war declared on us and we'd bet-

ter surrender. Is that it? The Washington officials will say you're looking for personal publicity. Hope the newscasters will play you up."

I mopped my forehead. It was oppressively hot in Secretary Rankin's office in the Administration Building of Little America. Through the double windows the lights of the main street gleamed yellow on the packed snow. The time was 9 P.M. Greenwich, July 5, 1960. The governor was playing cards with some friends. My story wasn't important enough to interrupt him.

Rankin said, "To-morrow night at this time we're supposed to dim all our lights as a signal we've surrendered?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what I was told to tell you."

"And then decamp? Evacuate the city? Wouldn't that be a nice job, to rout out five thousand people in the middle of this hellish polar winter! Do what with them? March them out over the Ice Barrier?"

"I've told you all I know," I protested.

"How will this bandit's daughter know whether we dim our lights to-morrow night or not?"

"She'll be circling overhead in her aëro."

"Like you did awhile ago?" Rankin demanded sarcastically.

"Yes."

"Well, if her plane was up there to-night, our lookouts didn't see it."

He was exasperating. "Don't be a fool," I retorted. "I volplaned down, didn't I?"

The little winged board—a volplane of the old type—had brought me down from Naina's plane. I had landed alone on the Little America field. Naina had sent me at once on her

mission. The weather was propitious; the trip had taken only a few hours. There was no one on the plane whom I knew. Some were Margones's men, but most of the crew were native Antarticans. I had not seen Helga or David again. Naina came to start me off. She assured me that David was not seriously hurt. She added:

"You may think to advise your country to try and send a warplane here against me. Don't do it! I warn you, don't!"

"Why not?" I demanded.

"It will never reach here. I will turn it back with high winds or a blizzard. And if it makes the attempt, I will kill this Helga and David, and Johnson too."

She stared at me with her smoldering eyes. "Do you believe me?"

I did indeed. And now, talking with Rankin, I suppressed my instinct to suggest that an expedition be sent to locate this bandit camp and rescue the American prisoners.

I repeated, "I volplaned down, didn't I? You don't suppose I dropped from heaven?"

He smiled at that. "I believe your story, Welch. But this weather control part stumps me. Daughter of the White Bandit, sailing over Little America tonight—all right. I have to believe it. But why didn't we see the plane?"

"Because its weather-control apparatus threw a dark-gray cloud under it like a smoke screen. You saw that cloud, didn't you?"

"Yes," he admitted. "Looked like one of those damned blue storms, but it didn't materialize."

"You saw the blue flashes? Your weather was disturbed? Crazy switching winds?"

As he nodded, I added, "Well, there is nothing mysterious in it. If poor

Blakely or any of his men were here, they'd tell you all about it. They had it with their expedition; Johnson is the only one of them left alive."

RANKIN was convinced at last. "But look here," he said, "we'll put this up to the governor. What would you advise us to do? He'll do what you say, short of taking the threat of an outlaw too seriously. Shall we get a warplane to fly down from Dunedin and try and locate this bandit camp?"

"No!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?"

I told him why.

"Well, then, we'll have to wait and see what she does to us."

"You couldn't get the warplane anyway," I said. "The red tape at Washington would hold it up two or three days."

I could imagine us trying to explain this bandit threat to the stodgy Washington officials!

Rankin said, "You're right on that. Whatever she does will happen tomorrow night. Look here, what will she do to us? A hell-raising blue blizzard? We can weather it. Listen: how will she know whether we dim our lights or not?"

"I told you she'd be overhead."

"Yes, but if she's above that liquid air cloud?"

"She might let down a television finder," I suggested.

"Has she got that apparatus, too?"

"I suppose so. Every raid of the White Bandit gave him something."

Rankin thought a moment. "Has she got a radiophone? Why don't we open communication with her?"

"She can receive," I said. "I don't know about her sending. You might try."

We tried it later that night. There was no result. "If she can receive," said Rankin, "she could certainly go to the nearest cache and answer us."

In the old days, I have read, in the Cordilleras between Chile and the Argentine, there were little houses built on the mountain trails. A sort of "travelers' rest." The idea had been adopted in modernized fashion here in Antarctica. In many parts of the different colonies, and in the unclaimed regions, stone shelters were erected. Food and fuel were cached in them; and there was always a radiophone. It often got out of working order; and the White Bandit, no doubt, or other hands of the nomadic natives, had systematically taken the supplies from some of them. But there were still many such caches, "shelter stations" for any one in distress, located in the isolated mountain sections.

"You suppose there's one near this bandit camp?" Rankin asked. "Just where is the bandit camp?"

I could not tell him that, beyond that it was supposed to be within a few hundred miles of the Chilean colonial city of Santiago Pequeño.

We argued all that evening. The governor, when we went to him, was interested and frankly skeptical.

"It sounds as though you were inclined to exaggeration, Welch—not to say hysteria. But I'll admit your story weaves into the known facts."

"What are the known facts?" I asked.

The governor laid a sheaf of official radio reports before us on his desk.

"Here are the real facts, officially speaking. The Bureau of Meteorology plane that was bringing Helga Johnson south ran into a blizzard, night of July 3. It fell on the trail at the fifth beacon north of your Plateau Station. The

bodies of its crew were found, frozen, by a party from the Plateau Station on July 4. That was yesterday. Frozen bodies, you understand; not murdered as you said."

I RECALLED what Johnson had told us: the blue ray froze the bodies of its victims.

"But Helga Johnson," I demanded. "Her body wasn't found?"

"No. She's missing; they haven't found her."

"What about the rescue party my station sent out in the blizzard the night of the 3rd? The one I was with. And David Dragon?"

"It came to grief. The men were found dead, not murdered. Dead, frozen." His face was solemn. The horror of all this was getting to him now; I could see that. He added, "I'm giving you what the official radio reports say. I'll admit, Welch, there's something damn queer about all this."

"Queer? What about Dragon and me?"

"Listed as missing." He shuffled the flimsies. "Your station, Welch, is operating normally. The tank-sled was brought in. Some of your dogs found their way back. The Meteorological Bureau's plane was found to be unharmed. Your boys flew it to the Plateau Station when the storm let up as it did shortly after the tragedy. Rollins is in charge since Dragon was lost. Clarke is sending thirty men from here in Little America to replace the deaths."

He shoved the papers aside. "I'll report to Washington what you say, and if this bandit's daughter or whatever she is makes any demonstration against us, why, that will be something tangible. Something to corroborate your story."

A gray-haired, rugged-faced, dignified old fellow, this Governor Bland. In his day he had been a fighter, used to the wild places of the earth. He smiled at me.

"In a few days, Welch—if there is any demonstration against us—Washington will send a warplane or two for the purpose of quelling what they'll call the 'native uprising.' Meanwhile," he shrugged, "as you doubtless know, beyond the automatics of the city police, and a few miscellaneous arms, the great United States in Colonial Antarctica is in a total state of unpreparedness."

"If the weather is bad," Rankin suggested, "this bandit won't be able to get here in that plane. It couldn't fly in a blizzard. Or could it, Welch?"

There was a touch of sarcasm in his question. I retorted, "Suit yourself. It's no different from any other plane except it's old-fashioned; but it has Johnson's weather-control mechanism."

"Well," said the governor, "I'll get off my report. We'll hope for bad enough weather to keep them away. And when the warplanes come, if the weather isn't too bad for them to get down, we'll see what we can do toward handling this bandit. I believe your story, strange as it sounds, Welch. We'll have to make some plans for releasing these prisoners. You can't tolerate American citizens being held by bandits, you know."

But the weather wasn't bad; on the contrary, it turned, for Antarctica, exceedingly good. July 6, 9 P.M. Greenwich time, approached. It was calm, quiet, with a low temperature not unpleasant; a moonless sky, with the stars blazing gems such as only the heights of Antarctica can reveal.

There is a small tower projecting

above the roof of the Administration Building in Little America, a circular room set with many windows. In it, as the hour approached when Naina had ordered us to dim our lights, Governor Bland, Rankin and I sat together waiting. And at five minutes after nine the blue blizzard began.

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN INEXPLICABLE.

MEANWHILE, in Naina's camp, David came to his senses to find himself lying on a couch in a cell-like cave room, with Naina bending over him. He was confused at first; he could not remember what had happened. But here, close over him, was the vision of beautiful girlhood. He felt the warmth of her against him.

"Naina."

He murmured it. He stirred. Instinctively his arms went out to clasp her. But as he moved, she drew away.

"So you are not dead, David Dragon?"

She was smiling her imperious, ironic smile. David's head was clearing; his senses clarifying. But there remained with him the confused memory of her face as he had seen it when first he opened his eyes. A tenderness? Or a fear upon it—a horror as she sat bending over him, thinking perhaps that she had killed him?

Whatever it was, it had vanished. She repeated calmly:

"I thought you might be dying. Margones said not, and he is more experienced with men who have been struck upon the head than I."

David sat up. There was a lump on his head, and blood matting his hair. But it seemed only a scalp wound. He smiled, "I guess I'm all right."

He felt stronger in a moment; he sat back against the stone wall which was behind the couch.

"Where are Joe and Helga? How long have I been unconscious?"

"Not long. Margones carried you here. I have sent Joe Welch to Little America."

She sat at the end of the couch, calmly regarding David. "You made me angry—I did not exactly mean to punish you in such a way."

"Thanks," said David dryly. "What are you going to do to me next?"

He saw that there were no windows in the room. The door was partly opened; the white garment of a man standing outside was visible.

"Keep you here," she said. "My plane, which has taken Joe Welch to Little America, will be back soon. Tomorrow night I'm going for their answer. Would you like to go with me?"

"Yes." David's mind was roving upon the possibility of escape; and upon other things also. "Yes," he repeated. He stared at her through a moment of silence, then said earnestly:

"Naina, they won't take your threat very seriously. Don't you know that?"

The red was mounting into her throat. He added hastily, "You plan to fling one of the blue blizzards against Little America. They are used to blizzards. It won't hurt them."

"We shall see."

"Yes, but Naina—" He found himself talking to her as though she were a headstrong child. "What good can it do you and your people to antagonize America? You're holding Johnson here. He's an American citizen; now that they know you've got him, they won't tolerate it. And Helga is an American."

"I won't hurt you." She smiled scornfully. "Don't be afraid of me."

He went on more vehemently, "Naina, if you'd only see it the other way round! Johnson's weather control apparatus could be of immense value to the world. Rightly used, here in Antarctica—"

"What interest have I in your world? I'll use the blue ray, some day, to benefit Antarctica; when your cursed nation is out of here."

"Why do you hate America so? It's your country, isn't it? Wasn't your father an—"

He checked himself abruptly. Her face had gone white; her eyes smoldered.

"My country? You talk like a fool!"

He reached to touch her, but she flung off his hands. "Naina, tell me."

She jumped to her feet, blazing. "You are impertinent. Stay where you are. I will send food to you. But I want no more talk with you."

"Naina—"

"Be quiet!"

He lowered his voice; he did not move from his position on the couch, but with his intense gaze he tried to hold her. "Is that Margones out there?"

"No," she said.

"Sit down again. I want to talk to you about Margones. Perhaps you don't understand—I mean you trust him too much. He—"

"I've had enough of you!"

SHE whirled about, and left the room. The door slammed after her; David heard its bars rasp.

The Antarctic native woman who brought him a meal spoke a little English. She assured him that Helga was safe.

"What is your Naina going to do with her?"

The woman shrugged. "Who say what the Naina do?"

Then Naina came again. She stood in the center of the room, smiling sweetly.

"You are all right now?"

"Yes. Did your plane get back?"

She nodded. "The weather is calm. It made a quick trip. Your friend Welch is in Little America now, giving them my orders."

She calmly regarded him. He had leaped to his feet as she entered.

"I've been waiting for you to come again. Where is Helga?"

"She is quite safe." Her smile was queer. It held irony, a faint contempt for Helga; but something else which David could not quite fathom. She added, "You think you love that Helga Johnson, I suppose. Or is it your friend, that Joe Welch, who loves her? You men must always think you love some woman—that is your weakness."

David said, again lowering his voice, "Margones wanted you to ask a ransom for Helga. You were honorable enough to spurn that. I want to talk to you about Margones. I don't trust him; I'm afraid he—close that door, Naina."

She leaped between him and the door as he moved toward it. There was a guard in the corridor. She slammed the door. She turned back to David.

"What did you ask me?"

"Nothing. I was going to say, about Margones—"

"You talk as though I were an imbecile. Margones and his Chileans are useful to me. Men are needed here; our life is hard, there is always much work."

"But you trust him."

"I trust no one. Margones never had my plane unless my most loyal

men, armed, were with him." She waved it away. "You are a fool." Her mood abruptly changed. She smiled again. "But you interest me; I've never seen a man like you before."

Her words brought a new realization to David. This girl was by heritage intelligent and civilized; educated by her father, with a warped knowledge of civilization, but there were finer instincts within her.

She had lived always in this frozen polar desolation. Antarctic half savages, a few captive explorers, and Chilean bandits—it was all the knowledge she had of men. She had never seen a man like David before.

He stood staring at her.

She added: "I'll take you with me on the trip to-night. We start in a few hours."

"Yes," he agreed. "And Johnson and Helga?"

She frowned. "You are much concerned over that Helga."

David saw the flush on her throat. It set a thrill of fear through him; she might so easily be stirred to harm Helga. He said hastily: "You're wrong. I have no love for her."

"No?"

"No. I'm sure my friend, young Welch, loves her. He has for years."

"But not you?"

"No, of course not."

AS David reiterated it, a surge of emotion swept him. He laid a hand on the white flesh of Naina's arm. It was warm.

He said unsteadily: "I think it is you I love."

She allowed his hand to stay there. She turned, and her calm gaze searched him.

"So? You think that already?"

"Yes."

"All men think that." A glint of amusement came to the depths of her eyes; and her soft red lips curled with irony. But her breast stirred with her quickened breath. It seemed that perhaps she was experimenting with this emotion. Suddenly David was wildly stirred. He said: "All men can see your beauty as I see it." He dropped his hand, for the amusement on her face had turned to open contempt.

"Hate and love are very close, Naina. Perhaps it is not love I feel, but hate."

"So?"

He stood gazing down at her. His arms were dangling at his sides; he restrained a wild impulse to fling them around her. He said: "You don't want to make me hate you?"

Her breath came fast between parted lips. "I don't care what you feel for me. Why should I?"

"Because—" he began.

"Because it's fear you feel, not hate," she interrupted. "Every one fears me, and that is right; just as they feared my father." She laughed unsteadily. "I shall keep you with me and make you feel it always."

She went hastily to the door. He stood motionless as she opened it.

"Naina—"

She went out and flung the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

"WE COULD BE FRIENDS."

HELGA, during those hours, had been taken from her father and confined alone in a similar room to David's, with a woman waiting upon her. And just once, Naina came. She sat beside Helga, as she had sat beside David. Helga feared and loathed her.

"What do you want?" Helga demanded.

"So you do not like me to touch you?" Naina said quickly. Helga had drawn back.

"No."

"Well, then, I will not. You're going to ask me if David is safe. He is."

"What do you want with me?" She asked it as David had asked a similar question.

Naina smiled sweetly. "I have promised David a trip. I am waiting for the time to arrive."

"I asked what you wanted of me. You and your father generally killed people unless they could be of use, didn't you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

She asked it with a placid candor incredible, but Helga saw that it was real.

"Why not, indeed?" Helga retorted bitterly. "But you haven't yet killed my father. I can understand that—he's taught you everything you know."

"I think you exaggerate."

"Perhaps. Well, now you have David Dragon and me. You must think I can be of use to you. How?"

"You are a scientist," said Naina. "Is that true?"

"Yes."

"I understood so. I will tell you frankly; I want your loyalty. When I have driven your United States out of Antarctica, your knowledge will be of use to me. I want to rule my country intelligently. This weather control can be put to good use; I can improve the weather as well as make it bad." She smiled whimsically. "Besides, I have eavesdropped on many radio-phone messages in the past year or two. Your activity in Washington was not to my liking. I'd far rather have you here, safe with me."

Helga ignored that. "Have you heard from Joe Welch?"

"He is in Little America. I heard them sending out a call for me a while ago. They would like to talk it over. Hah! They do not know Naina, daughter of the White Bandit. I act, I do not talk."

"You didn't answer them?"

"No. I could not, anyway; I have no sending radiophone."

"You might go to the nearest cache. Is there one near here?"

Naina said: "You seem to think it is your part to ask me questions. I don't want to argue with the United States. I have nothing to say to them beyond my message Joe Welch gave. I will drive them out, or kill them if need be. Why do you stare at me?"

"You seem," said Helga slowly, "perfectly intelligent. But you are not human."

"No?" There was no flush of anger. "Why do you say that?"

"Because you have no regard for human life. You are uncivilized."

It interested Naina. "What do you mean?"

"I mean—" For an instant it struck Helga that she might make this girl understand. But words failed her. She said: "Nothing. You are inhuman, that's all."

"Because I kill?"

"Yes. Your whole conception of humanity."

NAINA was openly amused. "Have your nations ever killed one another?"

"Yes."

"And you called it war. Well, this is war. You who are civilized add many fine words to your killing. I do not bother with that. What is necessary, I do."

Helga stammered. "You are a woman, a beautiful girl—such things seem so incongruous, cruel!"

"And you think cruelty, as you call it, should be kept for man? Woman may be very cruel, Helga." Naina stood up. "I rather like you. We will talk again. You have quaint ideas."

Helga was silent. At the door Naina turned. "I would like to have your loyalty. Your help, because you are intelligent." Her smile turned ironical. "If you would let me, I could be your friend."

Helga stared at her. "When are you coming back?"

"I'm going to take David on the flight over Little America. The weather is fortunately very good."

"Will you take me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

It angered Naina. "That is not your affair."

Helga suddenly thought she knew why Naina would not take her on the flight. She said, as though irrelevantly: "You think I'm in love with David Dragon. That's foolish."

Naina's eyes were flashing. "It does not concern me what your emotions are."

"How long will you be gone on this trip?" Helga asked.

"Not long; twelve or fifteen hours."

"Are you going to take Margones, or leave him here?" Like David, Helga most feared Margones.

Naina stood with her hand on the door. "What difference? But I shall leave him here."

"May I stay with my father, then? I have not seen him in eight years. Will you let me stay with him?"

Helga had risen to follow Naina to the door; and she saw, with a leap of her heart, that Margones and two of

his men were guarding the passage outside. But they seemed too far away to have overheard her.

She touched Naina. "Will you put me with my father, please?"

"I thought you did not want to touch me?" said Naina scornfully.

"But I do. I—I like you. You said you could be my friend—we could be friends."

They gazed at each other. In most ways they were as far apart as the poles, yet it seemed to Helga, as she gazed at this strange, beautiful girl, that all in a moment the barrier between them might be bridged.

"Before we leave I will put you with your father," said Naina.

As she left, Helga stared silently after her.

A few hours later, with David standing at a distance in the passage, Helga was taken from this cell and led to her father's room. She had no opportunity to speak to David.

At Johnson's door Margones was standing. Naina approached. "I told her she could stay with her father. Johnson, here is your daughter. Guard them well, Margones."

"*Sí, señorita,*" Margones responded. Naina did not see his face, nor did Johnson. But Helga saw it; a grinning leer which struck her cold.

"*Señorita,* you can trust me always."

He shoved Helga into Johnson's room and closed the door upon them.

CHAPTER X.

THE BLUE BLIZZARD.

"YOU see the lights, David?"

"Yes."

A spot of yellow glow came up over the distant frozen horizon; the

lights of Little America. The uplands here at this twelve thousand foot altitude lay purple and black and white, a congealed desolation in the starlight. The overland trail wound back into the mountains, headed for the pole; it showed as a silver ribbon with occasional spots of yellow beacons. The night was cold and still, and the stars blazed in a sky empty of clouds.

David and Naina sat in the cabin adjoining the control room of the plane. It had been a swift trip, a few hours from Naina's isolated camp, down here to the inland edge of the Ice Barrier on the Frozen Plateau.

Naina had been unusually silent. She had paid little attention to the navigation of the plane. There were four navigating Antarcitians in the control room, but David had had no opportunity to observe them closely.

Another native, a squat fellow in white garments, sat hunched in the doorway with an automatic on his knees. Naina had spoken to him in the native language, and then said to David:

"He has my orders to shoot if you make a move to annoy me. You understand, David?"

"I will not annoy you," David said quietly.

The lights of Little America widened and spread at the horizon. Within David was a tumult of emotion.

He said, "You know they won't dim the lights for your threat."

"We shall see."

"Don't do anything foolish, Naina."

It was 8.45 P. M., Greenwich time. The plane was mounting. The thrum of its muffled motors hummed and vibrated in the silent cabin. Naina sat tense.

David moved to touch her. He

had tried it several times, but always she had cast him off.

"Let me alone." She flung the guard a warning glance. She added, "David, he might kill you. He has my orders—I would not want him to misunderstand, and shoot you before I could stop him."

David moved away. "They may attack us. They know you're coming—suppose they send up a plane to meet us."

"I'm going high. They won't come up through the black cloud."

They climbed steadily. David could see no other plane. The lights of the little city were closer, and far beneath them now. The checkered outlines of the snow-packed streets were visible; and the great gray-black gash, which was the near-by glacier with a ramp of snow field beside it.

Naina moved to a signal switch. In the adjoining room, David saw a sudden activity. And mingled with the thrum of the motors now came other sounds. The hissing of the weather control mechanism.

David had not been allowed in the plane's control room. But from where he sat now, he could glimpse Johnson's apparatus. An Antarctic was bending over it, operating the mechanism; fluorescent tubes glowing with intensified electronic streams; mirrors with beams of tiny blue light upon them, whirling now; moisture sprayed downward into the atmosphere; vibrations of unknown character darting out. And through the cabin windows, David saw a cold, blue lightning flashing with its tiny stabs.

A cloud of liquid air rolled out and downward from the vessel. The vibrations fed it. The moisture clustered down there into a gathering, falling

fog. The altered air pressure brought the wind. The plane swayed and bucked. Then it mounted higher. It steadied.

AFTER a moment, the mechanism was shut off. Silence came again; the blue lightning ceased. The plane was slowly circling close above a gray-black cloud which wholly obscured the landscape beneath. But overhead, the stars were shining clear.

"Almost nine o'clock," Naina murmured. A familiar type of television mirror was on the wall near her and David. It was empty of image. In the control room, David saw two Antarticans with a reel of thin-drawn wire.

They cast out an image-finder—a lens mounted with its Forsyte mechanism in a small metal cylinder. The wire lowered it a few hundred feet down through the cloud, where it hung like a camera gazing down at the city.

"Nine o'clock," murmured Naina. She snapped on the television connections. The mirror brightened. David saw the image of Little America as seen by the dangling lens. The city lights were shining clear. Defiance!

David could not see Naina's face; she was turned away from him. But he heard her voice.

"So they defy me." She stood up suddenly and raised her white arms to the men in the control room. And then David saw her face, grim and white, beautiful, but set with the stamp of her strange, irrational hatred.

"Defy me!"

"Naina—"

She did not heed him. She stood like a barbaric Eastern princess imperiously commanding death to her enemies.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



They stood for a moment, transfixed

The Snow Girl

Riding the wings of the terrible Antarctic blizzards she controls, Naina strives to conquer America's polar outposts—and only her captives, Welch and Dragon, stand in the way

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE WELCH, who is telling the story, is radio man at the Trans-polar air line's station a few hundred miles from the South Pole, in 1960. He and David Dragon go out in a blizzard to hunt for a special War Department plane.

They are seized by Antarctic bandits armed with a strange blue light-ray and taken, with Helga Johnson, from the wrecked plane to the distant village of the bandits.

The bandits are renegades who had been assembled by the "White Chieftain," one Roberts, who had passed on his hatred of the United States to his daughter Naina. Upon his death she succeeded to the rule over the bandits and a thousand more Antarctic natives.

With her blue ray, which creates terrible "blue blizzards," she plans to wipe out the American polar colonies, such as Byrd's Little America.

At the city inside the cliff Helga finds her lost father, inventor of the blue ray, who had been captured from an exploring party by Naina's father.

Ramón Margones, a Chilean pirate who is secretly seeking the gold in the mountains of Antarctica, takes Joe and David Dragon before the ruler, Naina, a beautiful but cruel and seemingly inhuman girl of twenty.

She has Joe dropped on the settlement of Little America, with orders to signal, by dimming all lights at nine the following night, that they will evacuate the post immediately. At that time she, accompanied by David, circles over the doomed city, their plane hidden by an artificial storm. The city is defiant.

CHAPTER X (*Continued*).

THE BLUE BLIZZARD.

Governor Bland, his secretary Rankin, and I sat in the tower of the Little America Administration Building. The little city stretched before us, white streets packed high with snow, gleaming with shafts of yellow that slanted out from the windows of the low houses. The Plaza was near by; with its storage buildings and its little church half buried in the drift, and only the spire and the cross showing. Behind it, at the edge of the town, the gray-black gash of the glacier and the Overland Trail winding southward were visible. It all lay wan and serene in the starlight.

Bland said, "A blizzard can't do much to us here. The danger is in the north, where they are unprepared for it."

A blue blizzard! These low domeroofed houses were built to withstand every hostile threat of nature that the

grim Antarctic could fling against them. There was no real danger here. These people of Little America were accustomed to blizzards. There could be no panic. An inconvenience, that is all. But my heart was pounding nevertheless as the hour Naina had designated approached.

"She'll come from the south, won't she?" Rankin questioned.

I shrugged. "I suppose so."

The stars off to the south bathed the snow and the ramp beside the glacier with their silver sheen. We searched there with our gaze, but nothing showed.

The news of this bandit threat had been kept fairly quiet. The city this evening was busy with its normal activities. These were few indeed throughout the long polar night. The streets now were practically deserted. A line of dogs drawing a sled came down the main street returning from having delivered supplies to the nearest trail station.

A few men loitered at the corner of the Plaza, round, gray figures in their heavy polar furs. I noticed that they were gazing into the southern stars.

Nothing showed. And then we thought we saw a speck off there. A plane? It may have been.

Rankin said, "We should have sent Franck up with a plane to meet her and scare her off."

But the governor shook his head. Bland was too experienced a fighter to trifle with the unknown.

The little speck off there in the southern stars widened. Then we saw that it was not a plane, but a small, conical cloud materializing over the glacier, far up; a small, gray-white cloud hanging there in the starlight. We stared at it silently.

Five minutes passed.

Bland said, "It's almost nine o'clock."

A leaden cloud mass was up there now. It spread over the city, hanging low, obscuring the stars. Through it a tiny stab of blue was flickering, like the heat lightning of a summer thunderstorm—a mad enough thought down here in the Antarctic.

Another five minutes.

Bland snapped his watch shut.

"Well," he said, "she knows now that the United States won't surrender to a bandit."

We waited, breathless.

IN the Plaza the sled stood with its neglected dogs tangling the harness, and its drivers standing staring. The blue lightning had gone from the cloud, but now it came again. The cloud darkened. A wave of white swirling fog rolled down from it—heavy vapor boiling and swirling like steam as it struck the warm air over the city. Warm air? The outdoor temperature this night was about minus 42° F.

It was insufferably hot in the Administration Building tower. Then came the wind. A roaring wind at first, we could hear it sighing around the eaves—a whine. But there was a threat to it. And presently it swung and came the other way with a snarl. A blast shook our tower in a sudden explosive puff.

Rankin exclaimed, "That was—"

It was gone at once. We could feel the chill of it even through the double panes. Down in the Plaza the harnessed dogs were frightened. We saw the men standing there make a sudden run, one way and then another. Lashing the dogs, they mounted the sleigh and vanished down a side street. A swirl of dissipating vapor had come

down from the cloud and touched them with its deadly breath. I do not know what the temperature of that white mist may have been; they say now that it can be near minus 200° F. The men said afterward that a mere whiff of it had touched them—an icy touch that burned like fire.

Then came the snow, a solid slanting sheet of tremendous soft white flakes, abnormally, unnaturally large. The wind was from the south. The snow obscured the city lights. It whirled and sucked through the deserted streets; the street lights showed dimly through its white murk.

Then the wind shifted. A crazy wind. It swung from north to south like a wildly swaying pendulum. The snow was crazily tossed. A fount of it struck the Plaza; snow surging like a giant whirlpool—a white geyser spouting into a mounting cascade of flakes. It sucked up the drift-snow from the ground. The naked rock surface showed for a moment, and then was covered as the blanket of white fell back upon it.

The gale was now roaring about our windows, an incredible torrent of sound. Inconceivable was the scene of storm-tossed snow enveloping the snug, compact little city!

I tried to reassure myself that it could not harm us, this man-made tempest, unless too prolonged. But as the thought came to me, it was denied by actualities. A blast from the north and south simultaneously seemed to collide almost upon us. Our tower shook. Some of its outer windows shattered; there was a rumble, sharp, almost like a thunderclap, as the air rolled back.

Bland gripped me. His face for the first time had a startled fear upon it. "Welch, that could blow us down!"

Rankin muttered, "Look there—"

A vivid blue flash through the murk briefly illumined the city. We saw a distant building—a supply house it proved to be—shattered and broken, collapsed like a child's house of cards under the crazy air pressures of the tossing wind.

"We're lost if this goes on," Bland murmured. But it did not. It was only Naina's effort to show us what a blue blizzard might do. The wind suddenly whirled away and left a dead, ominous calm. The blue lightning vanished.

The snow, in a few minutes more, petered out and ceased falling. The cloud overhead thinned. The stars broke through.

And presently there was a cloudless sky. A still, calm night, quiet and peaceful as before.

We gazed at the city, strangely buried in great masses of drift snow. One street was piled twenty feet high; another swept clean and bare; and that single building lying broken. The sky was empty, save for the brilliant, serene stars.

Naina's plane had gone.

CHAPTER XI.

MURDER.

DAVID sat staring at the television mirror in the cabin of Naina's plane. The plane was slowly circling above the cloud. On the mirror from the dangling lens the storm-tossed city was a blur of gray-white murk.

"Why," said David, "this won't do anything, Naina. It can't hurt them; they're prepared for it."

She did not answer. She sat tensely silent, staring at the mirror.

David's mind flung northward. He saw, as though with prophetic vision,

a great northern city—New York City, perhaps, with its towering buildings of masonry and steel; its millions of people. New York City in the summertime, perhaps. Sweltering in the heat. Not the compact and sturdy polar village of Little America, but the huge beehive that was New York. A cloud in the sky some summer night; a sudden seeming thunderstorm, and then snow! A blizzard with sub-zero temperatures, descending suddenly upon a shirt-sleeved sweltering multitude. What a weapon for modern warfare was this! He envisaged the lurking enemy in the cloud-hidden sky—Chile, perhaps!

His mind swept to Margones. This Chilean bandit had the secret.

"It can't hurt Little America."

But on the mirror he saw in the dim swirling murk the collapse of the storehouse building. Why, this could bring death to every home in Little America!

David rose to his feet. He forgot the guard in the doorway behind them.

"Naina, stop! You have shown them!"

She leaped up. Even with her emotion, she had the presence of mind to gesture to the guard. David took a step and gripped her by the shoulders. The guard stood alert, with weapon upraised, but he did not fire.

David repeated vehemently, "You have done enough; you have shown them!"

She met the challenging gaze, and abruptly he relaxed, for he knew that this time he had won. She drooped under the grip of his fingers.

She murmured, "David, don't. You hurt me."

"Tell your men to stop that storm!" He released her.

She raised her arms. She gave the

command. She turned away from David and stood gazing through the window where beneath the ship the blue lightning presently ceased its flashes and the cloud was dissipating.

David sat watching her. For ten minutes or more she did not move. The plane had turned and sped away. The cloud was gone. The serene starlit night was around them.

David said at last, "Naina, come here."

She stood, grim, white, and silent; imperious; lost in her thoughts.

"Naina, come here. Sit with me."

She turned, and on her face was a hint of triumph.

"You saw, David?"

"Yes, I saw."

She sat down by him.

He said presently, "You have shown them. But to what purpose?"

It swept him again, the power of this weapon.

"Naina, you are an American. If your country—if our country had such a weapon as this, for war or for peace—why, Naina, there's no limit to what it could do. Drive away storms instead of make them."

He put out his hand and touched her arm. He added gently, "That would be better, Naina, wouldn't it?"

She allowed his hand to rest there. Her face was turned away from him. He sat very still; and suddenly she shook off his hand and, turning, gestured to the guard to go back from the doorway.

DAVID followed her gesture. When she was back beside him, he touched her again—touched her arm, and then found her hand and clasped it.

The cabin was very silent. Only the thrum of the motors and the occasional

voice of one of the men in the adjoining room.

"Naina, why do you hate my country—our country—so much?"

He said it very gently, earnestly. His hand tightened upon hers. He held his breath, afraid that his words would anger her.

But it seemed now as though perhaps the spell of his manhood, his emotion—or the emotion between them, perhaps, surging through their clasped fingers, were at last too strong for her anger.

She said finally, and her voice now was different; softer, more gentle than he had ever heard it before:

"I'll tell you. I had never thought I would tell any one. My father—" A break came to her voice, but she went steadily on: "My father was born an American. That's true. And he would have been, perhaps, a great man in his country. But then they said, one day, that he was a murderer."

David sat very still, listening as she poured it out. Her father had been arrested for murder; she did not know the details, or perhaps now she did not care to tell them. He had been tried and convicted upon evidence largely circumstantial. He had been sent to prison with his appeal denied, and had languished there for ten of the best years of his life.

"But he got away, David. I can't tell you how. He got away—broke from the prison and escaped."

A fugitive! Pursued by the law. A man without a country; living always in the shadow of capture. And he had wandered at last, like so many of his kind, into the new desolation which to him and others like him was the lure of Antarctica.

He was a man of intelligence. Doubtless a born leader, he dominated

the Antarctic natives. And so at last he had come to be known as the White Bandit. Obsessed with hatred for his country that had driven him here—

"You mean," said David, "that he was innocent of the crime?"

"Yes. Innocent, and the bungling laws of your United States wrecked him. And then at last he was vindicated."

Ten years ago now, in 1950, some one, some criminal in New York City, had, dying, confessed to the crime for which Naina's father—his name was Roberts—was paying the penalty. He had brought proof beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Why," exclaimed David, "then he need not have been a fugitive after that. Ten years ago—"

She blazed at him. "But do you think, with his life wrecked by the hardships he had passed through, that he would return then when the announcement reached him. Oh, yes, he could have gone back!"

"The newscasters carried it: 'The murderer Roberts was innocent.' But how could that make it up to him? Who seemed sorry that his life had been so terrible? Who did anything but sneer and say: 'Oh, well, it seems that the murderer Roberts was innocent after all!'"

She ended with a vehement, passionate outburst: "It only made him hate them worse, and made me hate them. Do you see? And they sneered at the White Bandit. They didn't know it was my father doing what he could to keep them out of Antarctica. I was born here. My mother was a native here. It was her country, and it became my father's country, and it's my country! And your cursed people come stealing into it, spreading out, taking the land—my land! I won't allow it!"

She stopped. David could find nothing to say. This girl, as Johnson had said, was so pathetic!

He stammered: "Naina, I—" He wanted to say, "I love you. Why, Naina, I said it might be hate, and you said it was fear. But it's love." But he only stammered, "Oh, Naina, you poor girl!"

She drew away from him. "I don't want your pity." The pathos had gone from her face and left it grim again. "Stay where you are, David. I should not have bothered to tell you all that."

SHE left him sitting by the empty television mirror, and went into the control room. In a moment the guard came and again stood in the doorway, with his automatic upon David, and his alert eyes watching.

They flew on through the starlit night. One hour more? Or two hours? Beneath the windows the frozen desolate landscape slid past. And David's thoughts were flying, too, thinking of this pathetic girl.

They passed over the familiar valley, the grim frozen mountains. As they neared the camp David's thoughts flew ahead; it seemed that a premonition came to him. Margones!

David recalled what Johnson had said concerning the bandit's possible purpose. There was gold in these mountains; Margones and his band were after it; and Johnson knew where it was.

David had been able to cope with Naina. But now, like a warning, came the realization that Naina was not his dangerous enemy. He must face Margones.

The plane landed on the field by the forlorn little settlement. In the shifting lights David saw the assembled natives. There seemed nothing amiss.

"Are we going inside, Naina—in the cave?"

"Yes."

She avoided explanations to her men. She gave directions concerning the plane.

"Come, David."

She hurried him away, and they entered the cave mouth. There were dogs and men inside. A spot of light showed women before a low stone shelter on the cave floor—a family group huddled there. The women were chewing skins to make boots for their men.

All normal. But David was breathing fast. There seemed none of Margones's band in sight.

"Naina, where should Margones be?"

"I left him guarding Johnson and Helga."

They passed through the lower entrance to Naina's cliff house. She added: "I suppose the officials of Little America will be trying to phone me. I think this time I shall answer them; there is a mountain phone station not so far from here. We will go to my instrument room, David. You have not seen my receiving sets."

"Naina, take me first to Johnson."

They were in the lower corridor. She stopped and eyed him in the bloom of one of the corridor lights.

"You mean, take you to Helga?"

"Yes. Helga and her father. I'm worried."

It came to David that he was more than worried. "I'm afraid that Margones—"

It startled her—his words, or his set, white face.

"All right, we'll go see them first. David, I shall tell them in Little America that my next storm will bring death, wreck the city. I can do it—you saw that building fall."

They went down the stone steps into the lower corridor. They had passed a native or two on the upper level. But it was silent and deserted down below.

They traversed the lower passage, with its glowing, dull illumination and its fetid air. They came to the door of Johnson's cell.

Margones and two or three of his men should have been here.

"Why," said Naina, "what's this? How dare he leave his post?"

No one here. In the silence David seemed to hear his heart pounding. No one here. The cell door was closed. Naina bent to it.

"How dare he—"

The door was unbarred. Had Johnson and Helga broken away and escaped? But in that instant, as Naina rattled the locks and opened the door, David instinctively knew it was not so. With a premonitory chill of horror, he was shivering.

Naina pushed the door open and they went in.

They stood for an instant transfixed. Upon the floor, sprawled face down, lay the motionless body of Johnson.

Helga was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

IN PURSUIT.

JOHNSON was dead. There was no doubt of it as they knelt over him. David lifted up the body.

"Murdered!"

It was strangely gruesome. There was no blood, no sign of a wound. The body was cold, rigid. The garments were moist; they had been frozen with a film of ice which now was melted in the warmth of the room. The flesh had a blue cast to it.

David rose. "He's taken Helga!"

Naina stood stricken; confused and with a white anger sweeping her. "Why, how dare he?"

David gripped her. "We must go after them in your plane. Has he a plane, Naina? Was there any other plane?"

"No."

They rushed back through the corridor. Naina came to an ascending cross passage, and through a small door David suddenly found himself in the main outer cave room. It was quiet, but Naina's voice echoed through it.

The natives clustered around her. The place was in confusion. They jabbered, but they were all frightened at her anger.

It was exasperating to David, not understanding the language. He stood for a moment in the midst of the group. Margones and his band had departed, that was obvious. But how long ago? Every moment was precious.

"What do they say?" he demanded. "Come on, we've got to get your plane."

"He and his men left on their sleds. These fools here! Margones told them he was making a trip by my orders. His men slipped away, a few at a time."

"How long ago?"

"I don't know." She gripped a small Antarctic man by the shoulders. She shook him, and he cringed before her, chattering with fright.

"He says they have been gone about two hours."

"Was Helga with them?"

"He thinks so. Some one in a long white cloak and a hood. It must have been Helga. These fools!"

From the cave house doorway a man came running. Naina heard what he had to say.

"What is it?" David demanded again.

"He had heard on the radiophone a message broadcasted for me from Little America, in the native dialect."

She stood bewildered with these swift conflicting happenings. "The United States demands my answer. My three American prisoners must be released or in a few days warplanes will be sent to seek me out. David—"

He waved it away. "Forget that. We've got to catch Margones and release Helga. Shall we take your plane to Little America and get help?" No, that would need too much time. "If this murderer went with sleds, Naina, he'll be leaving a trail in the snowpack. If the weather holds—if it does not snow—we can follow him with the plane, flying low."

A shot sounded from the open valley outside the cave. Then another.

David and Naina stood listening. A silence fell around them. Then a commotion began, there were more shouts outside.

The plane! Cylinder-weapon in hand, Naina rushed out, with David beside her. The little settlement huddled in the snow was in a turmoil. A sudden fight had taken place at the plane in which Naina and David had arrived a few moments before. Whatever it was, it was over now. There were no more shots.

"Come, David!"

THEY ran. At the plane Naina's natives surrounded her. She gasped and turned to David. Now, for the first time, he saw fear on her face.

"Margones left three or four of his men—my natives killed them when they tried to steal the plane."

They mounted into the control room

of the plane. It was crowded with frightened, excited people. The bodies of the Chilean bandits, who had been shot, lay there. One was still alive, but dying.

The control mechanism of the plane was wrecked. The last of the bandits, wounded, had, in a frenzy, torn at it. The electric controls were smashed. It would take hours, perhaps days, to repair them.

To David, it was in a moment obvious what had happened. Margones had murdered Johnson, abducted Helga, and, with his sleds, dogs and most of his band, had departed. But he wanted the plane. He had left some of his men in hiding here to seize it on its arrival and fly it to join him.

David drew Naina away. "Naina, this is no time to get excited. Anger is foolish. We've got to follow them."

"Yes. How dared he! If once I can get these hands on him!"

She stood with David outside the plane. He waved away the natives who crowded around them.

"Naina, what is the swiftest way to follow them? A sled?"

"Yes, a sled! I will take a sled with my fastest dogs—I can overtake him."

"You mean, go alone?"

"Yes. It's the fastest way—I have only seven fast dogs."

"I'll go with you."

"If once I can get my hands on him—how dared he do a thing like this?"

She stood tense, lost in thought. David knew that her dominant emotion was desire for vengeance upon Margones. She had ruled so imperiously; instinctively she felt that she only needed to have Margones within the sound of her voice to reduce him again to subjection.

But David's thoughts were upon practicalities. With the plane wrecked,

they were helpless here in this cold, desolate mountain fastness. It seemed best to follow the bandits with a single sled and fast dogs. There were twenty or more men in Margones's band. It would not be feasible to attack them. David would follow them cautiously and watch for a travelers' hut where a radiophone would be available. Margones and his band—whatever their purpose—would locate perhaps in some desolate, hidden spot. David would trail them there, and phone to Little America for help.

But he said none of this to Naina. Instead he exclaimed: "Get your sled ready. Hurry, Naina; your fastest dogs—I'll drive them. Provisions and water, all the equipment, and bring some weapons. Tell your natives we will be gone on a journey of a few days. Get a complete equipment."

"Yes!" she agreed.

"We'll catch him, Naina, if this clear weather holds."

The sled was presently ready. David was enveloped in his furs, which he had not worn for the flight in the plane. Naina was garbed in a long, heavy white cloak and hood. They stood by the sled, with its six dogs harnessed two abreast, and the lead dog in front.

The natives gathered in the gloom of the ragged outskirts of the settlement to see them off. The snowfield was a dim white-purple; the purple, star-strewn sky was cloudless.

"Ready, Naina? You have weapons?"

"Yes."

The sled was piled high with equipment roped to it.

David said, "Have you got an automatic?"

"Yes."

"Give me it."

He held his breath. He and Naina had always, so far, been in the roles of captor and prisoner; enemies, with a barrier between them. He repeated casually, "Give me the automatic."

She hesitated. He added simply, "I am your friend, Naina."

She handed it to him without a word.

David seized the handles of the sled. "You ride."

"Yes. We start downhill."

In a moment they were away. The dogs ran low to the ground, picking up speed. The packed snow showed a long gentle declivity. David in a moment mounted the sled for the coasting descent. The low white huts flashed by in a blur of movement. Soon they were farther apart; then they were gone.

The descent ended. The pace slackening, David leaped out and ran swiftly beside the sled, urging the animals forward with a long, lashing quirt. An undulating white desolation lay ahead. A trackless waste, pale in the starlight. But David could see now the tracks of the bandits' sleds which they were following.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE GOLD IS YOURS!"

I MUST revert now to that time when Margones shoved Helga into the room with her father.

The bandit said to Naina: "You can trust me always, *señorita*," as he closed the cell door. Helga had seen the leer upon his face. She was frightened, with a cold, shuddering fear; and it was seldom indeed that Helga was frightened at anything.

"Father, dear!"

She threw herself into her father's

arms. They stood listening while Margones barred the door. Naina departed.

"Father, I'm afraid of that fellow Margones."

He comforted her, as though she were the little girl of twelve he had always remembered.

"Naina is starting for Little America, Helga?"

"Yes."

"I've been worried about you. Did she treat you kindly?"

"Yes. She said I could stay here with you while they're gone. She took David Dragon with her."

His thin face softened, relaxed. "It will come out all right, Helga. Some day, when we get back from here into God's country—"

Life is very strange. It was given to Johnson to find the little daughter of his memories grown to a beautiful, capable, intelligent young woman; sitting with him for those few brief hours—and then to have his own life snuffed out.

To Johnson, this daughter must indeed have seemed very beautiful. Helga wore a suit of blue serge. Over it was a long cloak with a hood which dangled at the back. The cloak was a deep navy blue with a vivid red lining, a heavy military-looking cloak. She had worn it on the trip down with a fur coat over it, and an aviator's helmet. The latter were discarded in the other cell, but she wore here into her father's room this blue and red undercloak.

Johnson gazed at her. "You are very beautiful, Helga."

"You like it? In Washington they teased me about it—said it was very vivid." She took it off and laid it aside.

They talked for an hour of two. Then the door opened. Margones was

out there. He seemed alone. He had a metal tray in his hand.

"Your food," he said. He came in and put it on the table. He did not look at Helga. He turned and stalked out. The door slammed; they heard the rattle of its bars.

After the meal was over, Johnson, who had been talking in casual fashion, suddenly became furtive. He gazed at the door and lowered his voice.

"Helga, if I shouldn't get out of here alive—"

She flashed a startled glance at him. He smiled. "I've something I must say to you, something I must tell you."

He went quietly to the door and listened, then came back.

"He can't hear us, Helga. Above everything I wouldn't have him hear this. But I must tell you. One of the purposes of Blakely's expedition was prospecting in these mountains. There is gold here; Blakely believed it. The government wanted him to find it and stake it for the United States. More than half the money for his expedition was government money. No one but he and I knew that."

Johnson's voice was vehement and tense. A spot of red burned in each of his thin cheeks. "I've never told any one of this, Helga. Eight years ago—and I'm the only survivor of the Blakely expedition. The gold is mine, Helga! You know the law. Mine and my country's."

"You found it?" she murmured quietly.

"Yes. We found it here in these mountains. Not so very far from here. We found it, only a few hours before the White Bandit captured us. There seemed to be a mountain of it! The outcropping was visible for half a mile along a cliff-face. Nuggets, Helga!

Strewn at the bottom of the cliff, as though by an avalanche."

HE seemed talking against time. As though by some strange intuition the shadow of his impending death now lay upon him; he seemed to sense its nearness.

"That gold is yours, Helga. If I shouldn't live through this, you are my survivor—the last survivor of the Blakely expedition. And I want you to claim it. You know the law—the colonial law for such discoveries here in Antarctica? Or has it been changed?"

"No," she said. "Not changed."

"Well, it would be done like this."

The discussion absorbed them. They had been gazing, one or the other of them, at the cell door constantly. But now they forgot it, staring at each other, tense with this thing they were discussing.

The international law in Antarctica had been ratified by all the several nations holding possessions in the new continent. The conference had been held in London in 1951. By the terms of the agreement reached, the discovery of any natural wealth in any neutral, unclaimed territory belonged to the country of the discoverer. It was necessary then to plant upon the strike his national flag, and at once to notify the International Claim Office in London. In these days of almost universal government ownership and government exploitation, all the wealth of Antarctica was being developed by government funds.

"This is neutral territory, Helga. It will add a whole new region to Colonial America. It's worth colonizing."

The law said that the nation making the strike must establish and hold a settlement with a certain population.

This done, at the end of a year, the other nations recognized the validity of the claim.

To the discoverer, his nation paid a royalty. "Enough to make us fabulously rich, Helga—no doubt of that."

He lowered his voice still further. "There's a radiophone travelers' hut quite near our golden mountain, Helga."

His voice rang with the words. He repeated them. "Our golden mountain! Don't you like the sound of that? It's ours—yours and mine! If we can get out of here—to that phone hut—and send in a call for help to record the strike. Closer, Helga, I want to tell you where it is."

He murmured it to her. He could not tell her how far it was from Naina's camp, but he gave her the latitude and longitude.

She said suddenly, "Father, not so loud! You're talking too loudly!"

With his eagerness he had spoken louder than he realized. His back was to the cell door. Helga faced him. She gazed into his flushed, earnest face.

He reiterated, "It's all for you, Helga. That's what I've had in mind all these years."

Her heart was suddenly pounding. She went cold with fear. In the cell the odor of alcoholite became apparent—that intoxicating perfume which of recent years has been the curse of South America.

Alcoholite wafting in here?

Helga's gaze leaped past her father's shoulder. The cell door was ajar!

"Father!"

The startled exclamation burst from her before she could check it.

"Helga—what "

He turned with a rasp of his chair to follow her gaze.

They had betrayed themselves.

The cell door, which was open a few inches, swung wider. Margones crouched there, leering, the evidence of his menace written clearly on his face. In that instant, Helga, cold with fear, knew that the bandit had heard them talking of their golden mountain—had heard even its location, perhaps.

HELGA and her father leaped to their feet. "What do you want?" Johnson demanded.

Margones advanced, lurching, for he was far from sober. A wave of the intoxicating perfume came with him into the room; a strip of gaudy fabric hung like a handkerchief at his chest; he stopped to sniff at it as he advanced.

"Get out," said Johnson. "You're drunk." His arm swept Helga protectively behind him.

Margones did not speak, but he snarled, and ripped his cylinder-weapon from his belt. Helga was aware of the stab of blue flame. She felt its frigid blast. It caught her father full in the face. He wavered; mumbled thickly:

"Helga! Run—"

He swung about, clutching at her, with the blue ray on him. A wave of incredible cold, with a thick white mist like a fog rolled at Helga. She staggered; and then her father fell.

The blue light vanished. The fog rolled away. Across the room, Helga saw Margones reeling back against the wall, grinning. She was numb with fright and the deadly cold. At her feet Johnson lay motionless. She sank upon him.

"Father! Father dear!"

Ice was formed upon his face; his blue lips were frozen; his thin garments stiff.

The knowledge that he was dead surged upon her. She sank inert into the black soundlessness of insensibility.

Realization that he had killed Johnson must have sobered Margones. Helga was unconscious only a moment; she recovered to find Margones carrying her along a dim passage.

As she stirred he set her abruptly upon her feet and stood steadying her until she was able to walk.

The corridor was empty. He whispered: "You come quietly. If I have to carry you it will cause comment. If we are stopped, I will kill you—by the blessed Santa Maria, I swear it!" He led her forward. "Can you walk?"

"Yes." She was too confused to dissemble. She took a few steps; strength was coming back to her.

"Come then." He had brought her red and blue cloak from the cell. He flung it over her shoulders. Over it, he put another cloak of the white fabric, and drew its hood over her head.

"There, that will protect you from the cold. You come quietly, you understand? *Por Dios!* If you make a scene—if I am stopped or caused any trouble—then, beautiful as you are, I will kill you!"

He clung to her arm, hurrying her along. Her face and head were warm beneath the white hood. She could see very little. She was still weak and faint; confused, and with the horror of her father's death upon her.

All was a blur. She found that they were in the outer cave. She heard voices of the Antarcticans around their huts.

THERE was no alarm. Several of Margones's band joined them surreptitiously.

"Are you ready, Margones?"

"Yes."

"We start now?"

"Yes, Vicente. Are the sleds waiting?"

Whispered words in Spanish. Helga could understand it.

"All in waiting, master. Who is this you have? The girl?"

"Get out of our way, idiot! Walk along with us quietly."

They were leaving the cavern; the cold outer air blew on Helga's face. Through the hood opening, she saw the stars of the deep purple night.

"Faster, Helga."

"Who is this, master—the girl?"

Fingers plucked at her hood.

"Let her alone, damn you!" Margones rasped. "Vicente, it's gold! Millions of pesos of it! I got the location of it out of Johnson—he did know where it was, as we thought! Gold for us all. Hush! Here comes that ass Umo."

Some of Naina's natives accosted them in the Antarctic tongue. Helga, helpless, stood tense with Margones clutching her. He evidently satisfied the natives. They passed on, along one of the streets of the settlement.

Several times Margones was accosted; always his grip tightened upon Helga as he stopped to answer.

They came at last to a lonely place at the edge of the village. She heard Margones giving directions to four of his men. They were to wait, hidden in the village, until Naina returned with the plane, and then seize it, and join Margones.

Sleds and dogs were here, in a bustle of activity. A loaded sled and three men started off; then another.

The bandits were quietly departing. Ten minutes or more passed, until at last there was only one sled left; and Helga found herself standing alone with Margones.

"Come, little sweet one, it is our turn to start now. The traveling will be easy over the trail they blaze for

us. And in a few hours we will have the plane."

She stood in the starlight watching him as he moved about the sled with its line of harnessed dogs. The impulse to turn and run came to her. There were several huts here at the edge of the village, but they had been used by the bandits. They were unoccupied now. There seemed no one within immediate hearing; the dim settlement lights were several hundred yards away up the slope of the snow-field.

Margones was watchful. He came back to her. "You ride, Helga."

He put her on the sled, and enveloped her in furs. His touch lingered upon her warningly.

"Lie quiet."

The lead dog turned the sled at Margones's gesture. They started; slid out into the center of the packed, white roadway. The sled gathered speed. Margones ran at its handles, then he mounted it for a long swift descent.

CHAPTER XIV.

HELGA AT BAY.

HELGA glanced up from the Primus stove over which she was bent. She asked, "Where did you get this, Margones?"

He grinned. "It came from one of your captured exploring expeditions. You've used this kind of stove before?"

"Yes."

She soon had the food ready. "Sit here, Margones."

It was their first camping place, a bowl-like depression in the snow-field with ice crags near by, and the deep purple dome of stars overhead. They had traveled fast for several hours, and had overtaken the bandit sleds which were in advance of them.

Margones kept Helga apart from his fellows. The bandits were encamped now a few hundred yards away, a noisy, roistering group. When they first arrived, Helga had heard considerable discussion concerning this American girl which Margones was taking with them. The news of the gold had spread among the bandits. They were jubilant; they did not want the complication of Helga. There had been one argument.

"You fool, don't you know we take extra danger having this American girl? Suppose a warplane comes?"

"You leave that to me."

"Lupe, the chief likes woman's beauty more than gold!"

A roar of laughter.

"You leave that to me. I am master here."

Helga sat listening. She heard them planning; they had found at last what they were after. They were headed now to verify the location of the gold; to find the nearest hut where a radio-phone would be available; to telephone Santiago Pequeño. They would have a plane sent with the national flag to record the strike for Chile.

There had been discussion also concerning Naina's plane; they expected every moment that the four men they had left in Naina's camp would arrive with it. During the trip Margones had often cast a backward glance into the stars; but so far there had been no sign of it.

Margones cursed the calmness of the weather. If a snowfall would only come and obliterate their trail—or if the plane would come and take them aboard and thus leave their tracks ending blindly here in the snow waste. But the plane did not come. And the weather held calm and cloudless.

Helga had fought and conquered her

emotion. She was pretending docility, even friendliness. She wondered if it fooled this man.

Margones had been drunk when he entered Johnson's cell. But he was sober enough afterward. He sat now by the Primus stove with Helga. They ate the meal. She was conscious always of his gaze upon her. He said abruptly:

"I know where this outcropping of gold is." He grinned. "A Chilean city will be built there within a month. I and my men will all be rich. You do not ask why I take you with me?"

It made her heart stop. She said, "No. Why?"

"Because you are a woman. I love you."

HE said it with a sudden rush of intensity. He reached toward her, but she moved away.

She forced herself to say steadily, "You frighten me—because I am a woman."

"Frighten you?"

"Yes."

Their gazes met. He had flung back the white insulated garment which enveloped him. A gaudy sash was tied about his waist. A scarf was around his hair, exposed now as he pushed back his hood. His heavy blue-jowled face was smiling at her. A very modern, romantic fellow this Chilean renegade must have believed himself to be.

He said, "*Ay de mi!* I want not to frighten you, *chiquita.*"

She wondered if he could see how really frightened she was. Her eyes held level; she added:

"Women of my race understand man's love. But fear does not mix with love. You do not want me afraid of you, Margones?"

He said, "My name is Ramón—"

She echoed, "Ramón." She even smiled at him, this murderer of her father. In her heart was a fierce hatred; but she smiled.

"No," he said. "You have nothing to fear from love—it brings joy, not fear. Am I not good to look at? Among all my people, it is said I am good to inspire woman's love—and your love I want!"

A vague confidence came to her. She said, "I feared you at first, but not so much now. No! Don't do that!"

His hand had gripped her shoulder; she shook it off vehemently. But she forced a smile. "You do not understand a woman like me, Ramón. A different race—love comes differently—slowly and only when fear is gone." She added, with a break in her voice against all her efforts to control it:

"You do not want the woman rebellious—the woman without love? That is—not interesting, is it, Ramón?"

"No," he said sullenly. From under his robe he brought the strip of fabric; and a small bottle. He was about to pour some of the perfume, but she checked him.

"No, Ramón. That is not the thing a man should do. You endanger us. We need all your great strength, your cleverness."

He hesitated. She reached for the little bottle.

"Try it," he said eagerly. "Smell the vapor from it. That is love, Helga."

"No. I was taking it from you. Let me keep it."

He took it back. But she had gained her point; he put it away.

For a time they ate in silence. Helga's gaze went over the scene around them.

It was an utter desolation, with this man and woman crouching by the

flames of the tiny stove, and the bandits encamping near by. The sleds stood at hand. The dogs had been fed; they curled in the snow, tangling the harness. Off to the right a great ramp of snow slanted up obliquely. It loomed vaguely white in the starlit darkness.

Margones had said that after they rested, they would go that way. He had instruments; and he seemed familiar with the region—confident that he could find the mountain pass and the valley which Johnson had described to Helga.

Still the plane did not arrive from Naina's camp. Helga heard the bandits cursing it.

MARGONES said, "Well, we go on with the sleds then, Helga. It is not so far now, this gold of ours."

"What will you do?" she asked.

"Do? We will locate it and camp by it. And then find a radiophone. In Santiago Pequeño they will be glad to know what we found. It will be for Chile, Helga—your country and mine. You will be a rich woman—richest of all in Santiago Pequeño. We will live there—or perhaps we go north, to Chile? Every luxury money brings will be yours, *niñita mía*—"

He would have touched her, but she avoided him again. "Not here, Ramón. Your men are watching."

He was flushed. "You like my plans? Great wealth—what woman can withstand it? And I am a man who knows what the woman wants—beautiful silks, and music, and the alcoholite of love."

Helga's gaze turned over the snow-waste to where their tracks went back toward Naina's camp. In the starlit darkness the trail could not be seen very far. Was any one following?

Would David, perhaps, be able to follow?

The bandits were ready to start again.

"Come, Helga."

"Yes," she said obediently.

They loaded the sled. Furtively Helga extracted a handkerchief from her pocket and dropped it in the snow.

"Yes, Ramón, I'm ready."

They started, all the sleds in a line now. Margones was jubilant. "Those fool men I left at the camp, they have failed to get the plane. But what matter. See, Helga, the snow comes."

The night was clouding over. A still calm fall of snow was beginning. It would not impede their traveling, but it would obliterate the trail.

They journeyed on, winding upward now into a broken country. Mountains showed ahead of them. Another hour. The snow was steadily falling.

The line of sleds wound at last into a mountain pass. Helga and Margones were now leading. Through the pass, into a little valley.

The golden mountain! The words echoed in Helga's mind, a requiem to her poor dead father. A cliff was here with a broad slope down from a ledge near its top—a ramplike declivity down to the valley floor. Ice-craggs were piled about; the snow lay thick. But there were places where the wind had bared the naked rock, with only the soft, present snowfall whitening it.

Margones stooped over a loose pile of stones. He held one up.

"Gold, Helga!"

She stared at the little chunk of rock, green-yellow with its gold. Nuggets of it here. This metallic rock, lying here hidden in the polar desolation—all the world's civilized luxury could be had in exchange for this! An avalanche of gold, fallen here at the foot

of this cliff. There across the ragged, frozen mountain face, the outcropping vein lay like a swordslash. The "Johnson Lode," it is marked now on the charts.

The bandits gathered in triumph. They stood and gloated and picked up the stones and filled their pockets. The snowflakes swirled around them.

And Helga stood silent with the vision of her dead father's face before her. His words were echoing, "Our golden mountain."

The valley was open at the farther end—an upward slope toward the Chilean colony; Santiago Pequeño was that way, not over two hundred miles, Margones figured.

"We will camp here, Helga."

SOME of the bandits had mounted to the ledge up the cliff. There seemed to be a cave-mouth up there. The ascent was not too steep for the dogsleds.

The bandits called down.

"A cave," said Margones. "They have found a cave."

They climbed. The snow momentarily ceased. The stars briefly showed through a break in the clouds. The scene brightened.

"Helga, do you see that?"

Across the valley, a few miles away, was another jagged cliff-face. On its white, frozen side, a black spot showed. Margones studied it with his binoculars.

"A travelers' hut, Helga! Look—*Dios*, what luck is this!"

She took the glass. A little stone hut was perched on the rocks; the international flag, ragged and weather-worn, waved in the wind from the peak of its roof. Eerie little refuge, hanging at the edge of a cliff; set there so that storms might not bury it. An

improvised stone staircase led down a hundred feet to the lower rock levels. Behind the hut, a white plateau stretched upward and back into a starry darkness.

"You see it, Helga?"

"Yes." She returned the binoculars. "Yes, I see it."

She sat at the entrance to the cave, watching them struggle up with their sleds and equipment. The snow was falling again; the stone hut across the valley was almost invisible in the murk.

"Lupe, come here; you will be the one to go."

Helga watched and listened while Margones and Lupe talked in Spanish. A small fellow, this Lupe Albeniz, swarthy and dark, with a fiercely overgrown black mustache. His white robe was hunched grotesquely at the waist with a broad black leather belt. An automatic hung there in a holster, a cylinder projector of the Johnson ray; and a long, broad knife, like an old-fashioned machete.

"Lupe, we will be busy here. You go send the radiophone. Call Mariano—Señor Auguste Mariano, Calle Valdez. You know him?"

"Yes—sure I do."

"Tell him that he will come in a plane. We have the gold located—it is the richest of what we could have hoped. Bring the Chilean flag, and official witnesses, so that at once we can notify London. Tell him that we will expect him in an hour or two. *Por Dios*, we're rich, Lupe! Tell him we will all of us be rich!"

The golden mountain!

Lupe, on foot presently started away. His white figure almost immediately was swallowed by the white falling snow.

Helga sat staring.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Some one was inside the hut!

The Snow Girl

Deep in the frozen wastes of the south polar ice, David Dragon battles to rescue a girl and save a mysterious Antarctic kingdom

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE WELCH, who is telling the story, David Dragon, and Helga Johnson, on duty for the United States Government along the Antarctic Trans-polar air route, are kidnaped by bandits.

An American, Roberts, had been unjustly imprisoned, and escaped to found a colony of renegades in the Antarctic, hoping for vengeance on the United States; and he implanted this idea deeply in his beautiful daughter Naina,

who succeeded him in power. His bandits had captured Helga Johnson's father, an inventor, from a Polar expedition, and got his blue rays, a death-dealing cold ray that creates the terrible "blue blizzards" with which Naina threatens the Antarctic colony of Little America.

Ramón Margones, a Chilean who joined Naina's colony in the hope of finding Antarctic gold, overhears the captive Johnson tell Helga of its loca-

tion. He kills Johnson, kidnaps Helga, and escapes with his men on sleds, heading for the golden mountain.

Joe is in distant Little America where he had been sent with Naina's ultimatum. Margones's Chileans have wrecked Naina's lone plane; so David and the outraged princess Naina pursue Margones, with her swiftest dog team. As Margones approaches the mountain, snow falls to hide his tracks. He camps on the mountain, sending one Lupe Albeniz to the nearest radio-equipped travelers' shelter to summon help from the Chilean colony of Santiago Pequeño and to claim the lode in the name of Chile.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LIGHT IN THE HUT.

"THEY stopped here."

"Yes, that's evident."

"I think, David, we're only an hour or two behind them—perhaps not even that much."

David and Naina had been traveling some six hours. The weather was still clear. David had feared every moment that it might snow and obliterate the trail. There was always that danger; the weather in Antarctica changed often with startling rapidity. It was as yet, a calm night of low temperature; but David, running at the handles of the sled, found himself warm.

Twice in the six hours they had stopped to rest and to eat. By the stars, David knew that they were heading in a general northerly direction across the floor of this great valley. The mountains of the encircling rim now loomed ahead of them, miles away as yet, a frowning wall against the sky. The Chilean colony lay this way, that was obvious.

It was arduous traveling, yet for the polar night in Antarctica the conditions were unusually favorable. A frozen tundra, was this rocky floor, undulating like a great white desert. For miles it had been good sledging—drift snow fairly hard and firm. Then they had come to a broken region. Frequent *bergschrunds*—gaping crevices of tremendous depths formed as the body of a glacier moves from the snowfield—were encountered. The bandits' trail picked its way past them.

They crossed what to David seemed some frozen, land-locked sea, then again came upon a glacier with walls of rock from a mountain spur. A field of *sérac* ice was here, wedged masses of icy pinnacles created by the dragging strains on the glacier surface.

They made at times no more than a few miles an hour; but David knew that Margones could do no better, if as well. He thought of Helga, out here in this cold purple night. A sled so easily could side-slip. He prayed that they might not overtake Margones's sled with tragedy come upon it.

The rough area was passed; they came again upon the frozen plains.

"He stopped here," said Naina. They stood beside the evidence of where the bandits had made a brief camp—the remains of food; a melted, refrozen place in the snow where some sort of stove had been set.

"An hour or two ahead of us," Naina repeated.

David, poking about the remains of the camp, stooped suddenly.

"What is that?" she demanded sharply.

David held it up. Helga's handkerchief.

"She thinks we may be following." He made no further comment. In the dimness of the night, especially in bro-

ken country, they could approach fairly close to the bandits without discovery. But not too close.

"We had better rest awhile, Naina. And the dogs need it."

He fed the dogs, and then got out a sleeping-bag. "Don't you want to sleep for an hour or two?"

"No," she said.

They sat together and ate some dried, salted meat and fish. They heated water.

WHENEVER they stopped like this, to David came the consciousness of how alone they were. The barrier between them was so frail a thing. He found now that her gaze was steadily on him. As always, it set his heart wildly pounding.

"Naina!"

He laid a hand on her shoulder. The impulse came to sweep her in his arms. He had so often felt it! He repeated her name unsteadily.

This barrier between them—if he could once hold her in his arms, his lips on hers, it would break down.

He thought wildly, "She doesn't know what love means—but she can feel it, feel what I am feeling."

"Naina, dear."

He abruptly held her in his arms. His face went to hers. But he saw fear in her eyes. Fear of this torrent sweeping her.

She pushed at him. "David! Why—" The fear turned to anger. "Let me go!"

It was exasperating. "You foolish little girl, don't—fight with me—"

"Let me go!"

Anger. It was her instinctive defense. He saw that beneath the show of anger, she was really frightened.

He released her. "I'm sorry, Naina."

There was a silence. He watched her anger fading. She said presently: "We mustn't stay here too long. Would he dare take Helga over the Chilean border?"

They discussed it as though nothing had happened between them. Naina was convinced that the bandit was in love with Helga, desiring her so that he had forced all his men to this sudden flight, and that he was taking Helga over the Chilean border, where in Santiago Pequeño he might force her to marry him.

"The United States would not bother him then, David."

As an explanation of Margones's purpose it did not sound very plausible to David. But he could think of nothing better.

He said now, cautiously: "Do you suppose there's a raidophone near?"

She knew of one. She thought it was some thirty miles ahead.

"If they head that way," she said. "But why, David?"

"I was thinking it might be difficult for us to attack Margones. He has twenty men or more, armed."

Her eyes were wide. "Use weapons against me? They would not dare."

"They might. They're desperate." He saw her annoyance rising, but he plunged. "They used weapons and attacked your plane. I was thinking—are you friendly toward Chile? The government, I mean?"

"No. They have never recognized me as anything but the daughter of the White Bandit. My Antarctic government—"

"Well, I thought we might phone somewhere for help, for a plane."

"The Norwegians," she said. "There is the Whaling Company at Alert Bay. I have nothing against them."

"Yes, if we phoned, a plane could reach us in a few hours. Is it a thousand miles to Alert Bay? Not over that."

It was farthest from David's plans. But now he only wanted to get Naina to locate this phone-hut. He gazed at the stars; a sheen of mist was over them.

"We'd better get started," he said. "If the snow comes and obliterates the trail—we're finished—"

A blizzard, striking them out here, might be more than they could weather. But neither of them was considering that.

THEY started again, and traveled another hour or two. The snow-fall came; thick white flakes were now falling steadily, but still there was very little wind.

They struggled forward, lashing the dogs to top speed. They were winding into the white foothills of mountains. The bandits' trail was filling up. David saw it with sinking heart.

They passed into a white gorge. Steeply up through drift snow. A wind was here. Whirlies danced around them—whirlpools of the drift snow, caught and tossed by the wind, ghostly dervishes whirling in the dimness. They struggled on, just as, not much more than an hour ahead of them now, the bandits with Helga, had struggled.

They came out of the gorge into a broad valley. The wind eased up. The snow had suddenly ceased a few moments before; but now it came again. The valley was a dull gray-white blur. The bandits' trail, almost hidden now, led off to the left.

Naina said suddenly: "I think I've passed over this valley in the plane. The phone-hut is off there." She ges-

tured to the right. She told David what she remembered of the topography of this valley.

David said, "There's a storm coming."

It seemed so; a premonitory blast of wind, flinging the drift against them so that the dogs stopped and huddled with their drooping backs to it. A blast suddenly ended and gone. But David knew it would come again.

"Well, if you say there are cave-mouths over there, Naina," he gestured the way Margones had taken, "he'll camp here. He won't dare go any farther in this. We'd better get to the travelers' hut if we can find it."

She acquiesced. They left the trail and started off to the right. At that moment Margones and his band were camping on the ledge a few miles away in the other direction.

The snow every moment came thicker. There was another blast. They weathered it, and struggled on.

Naina was not sure enough of the locality. They went up a broken frozen slope; they reached the open uplands of a plateau.

"We're going wrong," said Naina.

They turned and went diagonally back. To David came the fear that they were lost. And unmistakably this was the start of a bad storm.

They saw the little stone hut like a haven in the murk close ahead of them. The snow was blowing around it. The international flag at its peak was a tiny waving spot. They were on the upper level, behind the hut. David saw that it stood on a brink, fronting the storm-tossed valley.

They dashed forward. But something made David bring them to a sudden halt. The sled stopped; the dogs turned their backs to the wind. It had seemed to David that a moving spot of

light had showed at the hut. It was only a few hundred feet ahead now, a dark oblong in the gloom of the night.

Was some one there? It seemed so.

David commanded the lead dog to lie down. He shoved Naina behind him.

"I'll go on foot."

They crept forward, dim, cautious white figures. David gripped his automatic. The little building loomed ahead of them. Its windows were barred with shutters. The spot of light was gone now. The place seemed deserted.

But was it?

They crouched at a corner of the building. The wind drove the snow about them with a low whine. A window was near at hand. Through its shutter-slits a blue flare of light was flickering!

Tiny flashes of blue light. Some one was here! Some one, inside the hut, using a radiophone!

"Naina, wait—keep away!"

With his ear to the shutters, David could hear. And he found Naina pressing against him, listening also.

A man was inside, talking in Spanish, his voice mingled with the hissing and flickering of the instrument. David caught a little of it, and Naina whispered a translation. One of Margones's men talking to Santiago Pequeño. Gold discovered here! The radiophone was equipped with the code-wave apparatus—the bandit could talk freely. Gold had been discovered here years ago by Johnson, of the old Blakely expedition, he said, but never recorded. Margones could get it now with the Chilean flag—

For a moment David was stricken into inactivity. A Chilean plane would be coming within an hour or so.

Within the hut, the bandit disconnected the instrument. David found his wits.

"You wait here," he whispered. "I'll go around the front—the door may be open."

On the brink of the cliff he crept along the front wall of the hut. He saw that the narrow door stood open.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE STORM SHELTER.

THERE was only one man in the room—a small, swarthy fellow in a white garment with a belt around his middle. He stood by the radiophone which he had just disconnected. The room was almost dark, only the vague sheen of light from the fading instrument tubes. David crouched in the doorway. The bandit was fumbling about.

The light faded into blank darkness. David felt Naina beside him.

"Get back," he whispered vehemently.

The room was suddenly flooded with a dull-yellow vacuum glare; the bandit had found the switch. It startled David; he stood revealed by the light. The bandit saw him. His lower jaw dropped; his fiercely upturned mustache twitched with his surprise.

David's weapon was raised. "Put up your hands!"

But the fellow, with disconcerting promptness, took a header and flung himself on the floor. David's shot went over his head. The report split the little room with a muffled, echoing crack. David followed it with a leap. He landed upon the half crouching figure; he felt his sleeve rip with an upflung knife thrust.

They rolled on the stone floor. David was far the stronger, and more than fifty pounds heavier. He caught the fellow's wrist, twisted the knife away.

David had dropped his automatic; he saw Naina dash forward and pick it up.

"Get back, Naina, I've got him!"

The bandit was squirming, with David sitting on his chest. The Chilean tried to get his automatic from the holster at his belt; but David reached for it, jerked it out and flung it back to Naina. And from his adversary's belt David also ripped the cylinder-weapon of the Johnson ray.

The little fellow suddenly squealed, "I stop! I stop!"

He twisted violently, trying to throw David off; and David cuffed him in the face.

"No, *señor*—I stop!"

"Well, if you stop, lie still, you damn fool."

He lay quiet. David pulled him to his feet. The Chilean stood eying them, then quailed as he saw Naina.

"Got any other weapons?" David demanded.

"No, *señor*—*no tengo ningunos*."

David searched him. "What's your name?"

"He's Lupe Albeniz," Naina burst out. She flung a flood of Spanish at him, and he cringed before her. He was obviously far more frightened of Naina than of David.

"Easy, Naina." David pushed her away. His mind was flying. Gold discovered here. Helga's gold! United States gold! The Chileans were coming to claim it. The message had gone in; too late to stop it now.

"How far is Margones from here?" David demanded.

"*Señor*?"

"I said—Naina, does he understand English or doesn't he?"

Lupe evidently wanted to be ingratiating. His face was gray; his dark eyes swam with fear of Naina.

"Me understand' the English—not so fast, you spik."

"Ask him, Naina."

HE listened to their Spanish. Outside the little stone room the wind was now howling. Snow was blowing through the open doorway. David slid the door closed.

"Watch him, Naina! What's he say?"

"A few miles from here; not far, across the valley. You could see their camp from here if the snow would stop."

Lupe described it. He might be lying, but he seemed truthful.

"Is Helga there?"

"*Sí, señor*." He added with a grin: "She love Ramón—they get the married in Santiago Pequeño."

"Shut up," said David. He cast his eye about the room. It was some thirty feet long by half as wide. There was the phone mechanism; the lights; a storage electrical heater; an electrical stove; a few pieces of dilapidated furniture; a litter of bedding; two built-in bunks.

Across one end, a partition divided off a smaller space into another—a windowless room. Tinned food stood here on a shelf; there were ropes; a block and tackle; coils of wire; spare radio tubes and vacuum light tubes; and a box of tools. Also some cooking utensils.

David seized a length of rope and came back.

"Stand away, Naina."

Lupe eyed him. "What you do?"

"Shut up. I won't hurt you."

"She no hurt me?"

"No," David assured him. "I'm going to tie you up, that's all."

"You sen' me Santiago Pequeño—*no he hecho nada*—" He wandered

into swift Spanish apologies and excuses.

"Never mind that," said David. He roped the little bandit securely and carried him bodily into the storeroom.

"You lie there. Not a word out of you. Understand?"

"Sí, señor. I no spik, *nada*."

"Good." David came back and faced Naina.

"What you going to do?" she demanded.

"Phone for help. We haven't any time to lose. You found the heat switch?"

"Yes."

The room was warming. Naina had closed the glassite windows; the electrical stove was glowing.

"Good enough. We'll have to stay here for awhile. Listen to that storm."

It surged about the compact little building. David flung off his furs. He stood gazing down at Naina.

"Take off that cloak; you'll be too hot." He helped her discard it. He did it swiftly; he was in a hurry, but he did not want to show it. Something in Naina's watchful gaze warned him.

"There's food in there," he said, "and utensils. How about fixing us something hot?"

He turned away, but she seized him. "Where are you going to phone—phone to whom?"

"Little America," he said shortly.

"No! I won't let you!" She gripped him. "I won't let you!"

HE finally pushed her away. Too much time had passed already.

Little America was much farther away than Santiago Pequeño, and the Chileans were already warned and preparing to come.

"Naina, don't be a fool."

"I won't let you!"

She stood in her long white dress; her pale golden braids dangled; her eyes were blazing.

Strange, imperious beauty!

She reached to seize one of the automatics which she had placed on a chair along with the cylinders of the Johnson cold light. But David stopped her.

"Don't bother me, Naina. I'm in a hurry, can't you see it?"

Their challenging gazes crossed. And as she stood fronting him with breast swiftly rising and falling, abruptly David's annoyance was gone. A wild tumult swept him.

"Naina, you don't understand."

"I won't let you call the Americans."

He murmured as though to himself, "I'll make you understand."

His arms went around her. He crushed her against him.

"Let me go! David—let me go!"

She fought, struggled, like a child against his huge lean body. She pounded at his chest with her fists.

"Let me go!"

"No, not this time."

He was bending her backward. As she fought, his senses swept off upon a torrent of passion.

"Naina—I love you! Don't you know it?"

He held her face, against all her twisting efforts. Her lips were parted with trembling breath.

"David—please!"

Fear was in her eyes. But something else now; a coming tenderness. Surrender.

"Naina, I love you."

As he kissed her, and she helplessly fought, he felt her suddenly go limp in his arms.

"Naina, this is love! Don't you understand?" He kissed her again.

Limp in his arms, now she hid her face against his shoulder. He kissed

her hair; and as her white arms came up, and her fingers gripped his shoulder, he kissed her hand.

"Love, Naina—and it makes everything different. You haven't understood."

"David, I—"

"Say it!"

"I—"

"Say it!"

She murmured, "I—love you, David."

"Love me?" His passion melted into sudden tenderness. "Love me? You know it now! Kiss me, Naina. Look! I've let you go. I'm not holding you."

He stood drooping, with his arms at his sides. And she flung herself upon him, clinging with her arms about his neck, her eager lips held up to him, and drew his face down, and kissed him.

"There—does that prove I love you? Does it, David? And this—and this. Oh, David, I never knew that love could be a thing like this!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DECOY.

NAINA sat watching David as he connected the radiophone.

"Can you get them?"

"Yes, I hope so."

He smiled into her luminous eyes. "We'll do our best. If only this storm doesn't hold them back!"

He made the connections. There was no answer to the call, for ten minutes or more. The wind howled outside the hut.

"Oh, David. Helga's over there—they'll take her to Santiago Pequeño. How can we get her back? He can force her to say she married him voluntarily. The United States would have no claim on her then."

The call was answered. Little America came in.

"I want Joseph Welch," David said briefly. "David Dragon speaking. International hut eleven." The number was on the instrument. "Is he there?"

"Yes, I can find him," said the operator's voice.

"Hurry with it! Danger here—matter of life and death! I want the United States wave code—don't want this picked up anywhere else."

After what seemed an eternity to David I came on the circuit. He told me hurriedly what had transpired.

"A plane available there, Joe?"

There was. The warplanes from Dunedin had not yet arrived. We had done nothing during those hours since Naina's threat, except try to communicate with her and wait for the warplanes. But we had a commercial plane available.

My heart sank at what David was telling me. Helga, captured by the Chilean bandits!

"Just where are you, David?"

"International Station Eleven."

"Where is that?"

"How do I know where it is? Look it up on your registry chart."

I could do that of course. "We'll start at once."

"Yes. Bring official witnesses and the flag. And men and weapons, Joe; there are twenty of these bandits."

He outlined his plan. I was to fly directly to the hut. We would have to figure some way to rescue Helga. To attack the bandits openly might mean her death.

"Hurry, Joe. If the Chileans get there first—I'm helpless here—they'll plant the Chilean flag, record the strike officially and be gone with Helga."

"Yes. I'll rush."

"How's the weather, Joe?"

"Terrible."

The storm was raging in Little America even worse than in David's locality. But it would be a flight with the wind.

"All the better," said David hurriedly. "The Chilean plane will be heading into it. Do your best, Joe."

He presently disconnected.

"Nothing we can do but wait, Naina."

HE envisaged the two planes—one from the Chilean Colony and one from Little America—racing here on the wings of the storm; each eager to be the first to plant their national flag, to record this golden mountain, to establish a new settlement here.

But it was more than that. If the Chileans came first, Helga would be snatched away. And if the plane from Little America came first—David shuddered as he thought of Helga, over there with Margones.

How could the bandits be openly attacked? Margones, with his golden prize snatched from him, his own safety menaced, would undoubtedly kill Helga at once.

"Nothing to do, but wait." He met Naina's queerly earnest face. Gentle now, tender, her eyes luminous as stars.

"I was thinking, David."

She drew him to the door and they opened it. The wind and snow swirled in, a frigid blast—they flung the door closed.

David had seen that although the wind was every moment stronger, it was, for the moment, hardly snowing at all.

Naina clung to him. "I was thinking—won't Margones wonder why Lupe doesn't come back? Do you suppose he'll send over here to see what's happened?"

They had been in the hut now perhaps half an hour or more. Such a possibility had not occurred to David, but it was obvious.

The door had an interior lock. They turned it, and flung down into place a heavy bar. The windows were all barred; these international huts were constructed to give refuge from possible attack.

They went to one of the windows fronting the valley, slid its shutter aside. Through the double glassite panes the murk of the night was visible. Blackness overhead; scudding black clouds; wind-clouds, rather than snow. Momentarily a patch of stars showed.

"You suppose our light might be seen by Margones, David?"

"I don't know. Perhaps."

It seemed to David that he could vaguely make out the form of the mountains across the valley floor. But no light showed over there. Would Margones come, or send others of his men to investigate what had happened to Lupe?

The captive was lying quietly in the storeroom. There had not been a word, or a sound out of him.

"I was thinking, David—you said, nothing to do, but wait; is that all we can do? Do we dare wait? I was thinking—my father once told me about the Alpha International Helio Code. Do you know it?"

He did; and comprehension came to him, of a possible chance.

"Does Helga know it?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. His mind flung back to a time when he had discussed it with Helga.

"Do you suppose, David, that Margones knows it? If he does not—and Helga could see and read our flashes—"

They went in to Lupe. Naina asked him in Spanish, "Did you ever hear of the Alpha International Helio Code?"

"Sure I did, *señorita*," he responded eagerly.

"Does Margones understand it?"

"No," he said scornfully. "No one over there understand it but me; I can work it. What you—"

Naina demanded, "Does Margones know that you understand the code? Did you ever tell him so?"

"Sure, *señorita*."

"Think well, Lupe. If you're lying, I'll find it out. You know how I punish."

"I speak truth, *señorita*. Margones, he has seen me use a helio."

THEY left him. "You think he's lying, Naina?"

She did not. Lupe was the most skilled with transmission instruments of any of Margones's men, which was why the bandit leader had sent him to the radiophone, here in the hut.

They decided to chance it. Naina took the cylinder of the Johnson ray. It was the strongest light they had.

"From the doorway, David—don't dare use it in here."

They put on their outer robes, and stood in the doorway, with the room dark behind them. The wind plucked and tore at them. There was another patch of stars overhead; the brink of the cliff with its ladderlike steps was close to the doorway.

The valley stretched before them, a dim gray void with its conformations almost visible. Across it, up against the sullen clouds and the patch of stars, outlines of the opposite mountain crags vaguely showed.

David stood with the cylinder which

Naina had shown him how to operate. He sent a flash—a blue-white stab of light into the murk.

Then another. Another. Long and short. Calling, in the Alpha code:

"*Helga. Helga.*"

Blue stabs of light. Even out here in the frigid polar night, the cold of the Johnson ray flung up a white mist. The wind tore it away. The blue light stabbed steadily into the darkness:

"*Helga. Helga.*"

Would she see it? Would she be able to answer? Or was Lupe lying? Would Margones answer? If so, then David would have betrayed himself. But if not, then Margones would think Lupe was calling, and he would get Helga to translate it for him.

David waited. Then he tried it again.

"It isn't visible over there, Naina."

She clung to him as a blast of the wind flung a swirl of drift-snow over them. They huddled, protecting their faces with the hoods.

"Try it again." She almost had to shout to make him hear her.

"*Helga.*"

They saw in the distant darkness a flash of blue seeming to answer them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

THE bandits were dispersed about the small cave, with its single narrow entrance. With this shelter from the wind, it was warmer in here; the heat from the several small stoves was soon apparent.

Helga sat apart. No one seemed bothering with her. In the babble of Spanish she was neglected. But not wholly forgotten. She moved once toward the tunnel; Margones immediately came forward.

"Go back, Helga. Sit still. Soon we have the food ready."

He rejoined his fellows. Helga listened to their triumphant talk. The four men they had left at Naina's camp had evidently failed to steal her plane. Perhaps they had been discovered and killed. What of it? Four less with whom to divide this gold. The plane from Santiago Pequeño would be here soon. Lupe was experienced with the radiophone—he would have sent the message by now.

Time passed. They began to wonder why Lupe did not return. He had trouble making the radiophone work, perhaps? Well, Lupe was skillful with instruments.

Margones brought food to Helga, and sat with her while they ate it. The wind howled outside the cave. Inside, the fumes of alcoholite were heavy. The bandits were in gay mood. The talk rose higher. Helga heard a lewd remark from a near-by group. Suddenly half a dozen flushed evil faces were staring at her.

"—this Yankee girl — they say Yankee girls are—"

Margones whispered, "I will stay by you, little sweet one—"

He was grinning; but she saw his fingers go to his automatic. Margones was sober. He had kept away from the alcoholite this time; he had cautioned his men, but they would not heed him.

Helga said, "There's so little fresh air in this cave, Ramón—this perfume—"

Margones touched her. "*Niñita*—think when we are alone, to breathe it freely."

"Yes, Ramón. But—but now, I'm frightened."

He rose to his feet. "Come, *chica*—of them all, only you and I have sense. We will sit nearer the outside."

A guard was at the cave-mouth. He was annoyed at having to be there away from the fun.

"Well then, go inside," said Margones. "I will wait here. Soon Lupe will return."

A patch of stars showed overhead. The white snow-covered valley was faintly illumined. It was snowing fitfully; the wind howled, then suddenly was still. Then howled again.

"Lupe will—"

Margones stood staring. "What is that? You see it, Helga?"

A blue stab of light through the murk across the valley. Faint, faraway blue flashes, coming evidently from the little hut over there.

Crouching in the snow, huddled in their white garments, Helga and Margones gazed fascinated. Flashes of tiny blue lightnings. The Johnson ray. Lupe's ray, obviously.

To Margones the signal meant nothing intelligible. But Helga stared with pounding heart. Uneven, waning stabs of light, like a helio beam.

She read to herself: "H—." The Alpha code! She read: "*Helga. Helga.*"

"That is Lupe," said Margones. "What, by the devil, can he want?"

Margones was puzzled; it seemed to Helga that there was chagrin in his tone. Chagrin because he could not read the signals, and was ashamed to admit it before this girl? She thought, of course, that it was Lupe signalling.

"*Helga. Helga.*"

WHY did he call "Helga?" Why not call "Margones?" Something within the girl told her to be cautious.

"That looks like the Alpha Code, Ramón. Does Lupe know it?"

"Yes. Is that what it is?"

"I think so. Can't you read it?"

The bandit had too much at stake; he overcame his pride. "No. Can you?"

"Wait," she said. "I think so." Something, some instinct, was warning her to go slow. She said, "Let me have your cylinder; I'll answer him—"

She stood with Margones steadying her. She flashed:

"Lupe."

And then her heart leaped and began wildly thumping. From across the storm-tossed night came the helioed words:

"This is David—are you Helga?"

"Yes."

She turned to Margones. She caught her breath, but she said steadily:

"It is Lupe, calling to you, Ramón."

"What does he say? By the Virgin, if he has not sent that message—ask him."

She sent: "I am Helga. Tell me what to do."

A long answer. She said: "Lupe had trouble with the phone. But he got them. He told them in Santiago Pequeño to land the plane at the hut."

Margones cursed. "*Por. Dios!* Why?"

Helga was quick-witted. Resourceful. She was outwardly calm, for all her thumping heart. She said:

"He has a plan, Ramón. It is a good one; wait, listen."

She was constructing her words partly by what David helioed from the hut, and partly by conditions as she knew them to be here at the cave. She was aware now that Lupe had been captured by David and Naina, and that David wanted her to trick Margones into bringing her across the valley.

"Ramón, listen: he says for you and me to come over. It is not far. He says, why should we divide our roy-

alty on the gold with all your men? He has a plan to avoid that."

"What plan?" Margones was interested; greed was in his voice. "*Sangre de Dios*, a bold fellow, this Lupe! But why not? Listen to those *borrachones* in there!"

From the cave came shouts and drunken laughter. Helga departed from David's instructions with details of her own.

"Ramón, I don't want to stay here. I'm afraid of them." She put all the allurements she could muster into her pleading voice. "Ramón, why should we divide our gold? With Lupe, because we must, but that's enough. We've got to take into shares some of the men coming in the plane. And, Ramón—over there in the hut it will be warm. You and I alone—and Lupe is very discreet."

He clutched at her. "Helga, *náimía*—"

"THEY'RE coming, Naina! See them!"

From the window shutters they could see the quivering light down in the valley. A moving hand-flash light beam, dimly yellow, lost in the swirling snow. It bobbed into view again, like a tiny boat on a storm-tossed sea, but it came steadily forward; and presently David and Naina saw the two white figures struggling on foot through the drifts.

"Get Lupe out! Threaten him."

"Yes," she agreed.

The snow-covered figures of Helga and Margones came mounting the ladder-stairs up the cliff; Helga was in front with the bandit holding her.

"Ready, Naina?"

David cuffed the released Lupe. "There—that's a sample! Understand me?"

"Oh, sí, señor."

"And I'll shoot—you'd drop like a rat before you knew what's happened to you."

They pushed him to the door; they crouched out of sight behind him, with automatics leveled.

Naina murmured in Spanish, "You call out, Lupe—then you step backward."

"Yes, I understand. I obey."

They heard Margones's voice:

"*Hola!* Lupe! Lupe!"

David opened the door, keeping behind it. Lupe stood there in the light, with an effort to hide his fright, and called his greeting: "Ramón! Come in. *Entre Vd.*" Lupe stepped back.

Helga came first over the threshold. She saw David and Naina, with Lupe quivering to one side.

"Hello, Lupe!" She turned back. "Warm in here, Ramón. Come."

Margones entered.

David leaped on him and bore him down.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE MOUNTAIN CREST.

THEY roped Margones and Lupe and laid them side by side in the storeroom. Naina stood over Margones.

"You dared to disobey me?" The old imperious ring was in her voice.

David drew her away. "No, Naina."

"But you have not hurt him—not punished him."

He smiled gently. "He will be punished. In Little America he will stand trial for murder." He put an arm over her shoulders. "You don't have to worry your little head about it—you're not judge and jury and executioner any more, Naina."

Helga stood gazing at them; at Naina's flush—and her obedience to David.

"Naina, you're beautiful," she said. They faced each other in the main room. "Beautiful, and so different."

"Am I? You're beautiful, too, Helga."

Without the outer white robe, Helga stood trim and competent-looking in her military cape of blue and red.

"Am I? You like this?"

David exploded, "Good Heavens, at a time like this!"

David had already hinted to Helga the reason for Naina's change. The girls clung to each other.

"Joe could get here in an hour," said David. "Look here—we've got to plan something."

David was afraid that any moment now the Chilean plane might come. It seemed incredible that it could buck this wind, roaring as it must be in the higher altitude. But still it might get through. If so, it was due here now.

"We've got to plan something, do something. With Margones's men over there, holding the claim, the Chileans can plant their flag and it will all be perfectly legal. I think I'll try calling Little America again to see when Joe left, and what the weather is."

Helga said, "Do that. Come over here, Naina, I want to talk to you."

They sat apart, while David hurriedly connected the instrument.

"Love him, Naina?"

"Oh, Helga!"

"Well, Joe could make me feel like that, only he doesn't know it. But this is no time to talk of love. I've an idea."

She told Naina how the bandits were roistering in the cave. "I had it figured out for Margones. Before we left them awhile ago, Margones told

his men to go ahead and get drunk. Well, with him out of the way, they would anyhow. They're all drunk over there now." She added irrelevantly, "They put some queer equipment in these international huts sometimes. Have you looked around the store-room, Naina?"

"No. Why?"

"I was thinking, if I could find a package of pins, and a pair of shears—"

Naina stared at her.

"And I'm sure there'll be tacks or nails, and a hammer. Come on, let's look."

David got Little America. The plane had started shortly after his previous call. The weather was about the same.

"What are you doing?" he demanded of the girls.

They had found what they were after. They were both trembling with excitement. They told him the plan. He listened, amazed; but it was feasible. The bandits, a score in number, would be roistering in the cave. Only one entrance, Helga was sure of that. They would all be stupefied by the alcoholite—there would doubtless be no guard.

DAVID and the girls had automatics, and three of the Johnson cylinders—Naina's, the one belonging to Lupe, and one they had just taken from Margones.

"It can be done!" David exclaimed. "We'll try it."

Within fifteen minutes they were ready. They verified that Margones and Lupe could not escape.

"Better gag them," said Helga. "No use having them shout."

They shrouded themselves in their outer garments. They took the hand-flash Margones had brought.

Helga carried a package and a coil of rope. David took the rope.

Helga said, "I'll put this other under my cloak. You think it's large enough, David?"

"Of course. What matter?"

Naina said, "Give it to me, please: I want to carry it."

With a last look around they started. They extinguished all the lights of the hut, and closed its door. David had again called Little America. The operator there was still in communication with the oncoming American plane. David sent word that the plane was not to land by the hut, but across the valley at the gold claim.

They went down the ladder steps—endlessly, it seemed, down into the torrent of whirling drift snow. They struggled out across the valley. The floor was a smother of tossing drifts. Whirlies sucked around them, dancing, ghostly unreal. Or again, a blast of shriveled, frozen flakes enveloped them like a sand-storm—a stinging blast that could not be faced; under it they wilted and crouched until it had eased off.

Helga was more familiar with the conformation of the valley than were the others. She led the way, with David and Naina behind her. There was no snow falling from the clouds now. Those were still angry black masses up there, but they were thin and split by the wind. Like flying scud they lay strewn across the star field.

In David's judgment, the worst of the storm was over. The wind presently would die. It must have been fearful in the open air above the mountains. Down here in the inclosed valley it was freakish, but without its power now.

The valley was brightening a trifle. The starlight was breaking through, and the line of mountains ahead was dimly visible; the peaked razorback

mountain which was Johnson's claim strike—Helga pointed it out; a sharply ascending slope up to a ledge; the cave mouth there where the roistering bandits were encamped; a ramp of frozen surface to its left, sloping to jagged pinnacle of the upper crest.

It was all dim and vague. From the cave-mouth itself the bandits could hardly have seen the figures floundering through the drifts on the valley floor, even had any of Margones's men been interested enough or sober enough to look. But David took no chances. They used no hand light; and they bore steadily off to the left.

An hour, it seemed to David—but it could not have been nearly that long. He feared every moment, with this slackening wind, that the Chilean plane might appear. But the stars off there showed nothing. Perhaps, heading into the violence of that wind, the Chileans had been forced down. That would account for the delay. Then the official expedition would come on by land. The valley off there opened up a slope to the higher distant plateau. The Chilean sleds would come racing down it, glaring with headlights and with flags flying.

DAVID'S thoughts were sharply brought back to realities. Helga twitched at the fur of his sleeve. She gestured toward the bottom of the ramp.

"I think we should go this way."

They began the climb. Another ten minutes and they reached the level of the ledge—a few hundred feet from the cave mouth.

Silent, frozen darkness. They thought they heard a distant, muffled laugh.

"On up," said David, softly. It was dark here against this mountain; but

the valley now was brighter than ever before. The wind had almost died; stars showed in several broad patches overhead. The white scene was beginning to glow serene under the starlight. Had the American plane fallen? It too could arrive any time now—if it had not fallen.

There was no sign of anything out there save purple-white, frozen, desolate emptiness.

They climbed for the crest. They stood upon it at last, fifty feet above the cave level, and a hundred and fifty above the valley floor. A wan shimmer was up here—white drifts, with the starlight on them. Pinnacles of rock upstanding like spires.

David uncoiled the rope. "We're in time!"

"Yes." The girls stood with him. Naina added, "There isn't any chance that if Margones's men came out on the ledge they could see us?"

"No," said Helga.

The ledge was hidden beneath the overhanging brow of this upper region.

"Besides," said Helga contemptuously, "they're all too drunk on alcoholite to do anything."

The cave-mouth was close enough so that in the silence now, with the wind no more than a gentle breeze, the sounds of the merrymaking bandits floated up.

David coiled the rope. He flung an end of it, which on his second trial went over a rock spire above them. He picked up the fallen end and pulled the rope taut.

"Now!" said Naina.

Helga exclaimed, "Look there!"

Across the wan starry valley, on the plateau in the direction of Santiago Pequeño, lights showed. A line of lights, coming up over an undulation of the snowfield. Lights, blazing on a

line of speeding dog sleds. The mining claim officials from the Chilean colony!

The line came over the crest and began the coasting descent; sleds, blackblobs against the snow pack, white in the glare of the lights they bore—and resplendent with their national banners waving in the wind.

CHAPTER XX.

“I AM AN AMERICAN.”

ONE scene more. I picture it as I personally saw it. Our expedition in the large commercial triplane from Little America was ready within half an hour after I got David's radiophone from the hut in the distant mountains. We took four sleds and their necessary dogs in the event that our plane went down and the journey had to be continued over the snow. It seemed a likely possibility.

We did our best to hasten the departure. I gathered the willing official witnesses. They would gladly have made the flight gratis, but the legal award of a small share in the royalties from the strike was an extra inducement.

The news of what we were doing spread rapidly throughout the town. Little America was excited. A crowd of furred figures stood in the storm at the flying field to see us off. We rose with flags flying; a spotlight from the field clung to us as we winged away.

I need not detail the flight. There were forty of us on board. We maintained for some time our communication with the Little America operator. We got the relay of David's second message—not to land at the hut, but to fly across the little valley. It told us the topography of the region. We made a sketch map of it.

I recall that it occurred to me to wonder that this gold could lie so close to Hut Eleven and not have been discovered when the hut was built. Yet there have been several such precedents in Antarctica. The valley, and all that cliffside, might easily have been buried deep in snow that season when the international officials were there.

At all events, after all these years the Johnson Lode was waiting, virgin territory unclaimed—waiting for the raising of the first flag. And it would not be a Chilean flag if we on this plane could prevent it.

We flew almost directly with the wind. Then we lost connection with Little America. We had tried several times to pick up Hut Eleven, but could not.

It seemed an interminable flight. I became obsessed with the idea that the Chileans would be there first. They had the storm against them, but they had less than half as far to go—and they had doubtless started first.

All this was overshadowed by my fear for Helga. All that I had heard was that she was in the hands of Margones's bandits.

The wind gradually lost its force; the stars came out in patches. Flying low, we skimmed over the Antarctic frozen uplands. Grimly forbidding wastes lay down there in the starlight. It seemed, as I gloomily stared down at the desolation sliding under me, incredible that anything could exist here worth man's struggle. Incredible that through the centuries this frozen continent was here, unassailed by man—and now to be the arena of nations competing for its riches.

We came at last over the rim of the valley, unmistakably our goal. In the observation cabin, where I was seated, a chorus of exclamations burst from

the men around me. But I sat tense, staring downward.

LIKE a stage setting, viewed with futuristic modernity from the air above, the climax of the drama in the valley was revealed. White-smothered valley floor, pale in the starlight. At one side the tiny blob which was the dark travelers' hut. On the other side, Johnson's razorback mountain ridge; a ledge and a cave mouth. A group of Margones's bandits had evidently just come to the cave mouth from inside. They stood, befuddled with alcoholite, staring at the valley.

The Chilean expedition was just arriving! The last of its sleds was hauling up into a group at the bottom of the upward slope. A glare of the expedition lights. Officials tumbling from the sleds.

The man beside me shoved binoculars into my hand. "Look up on top, Welch!"

On the crest of the mountain over the cave three figures were standing. Suddenly the spotlight from our descending plane fell upon them, revealing them brightly.

I raised the binoculars. David, with Naina and Helga, stood there among the frozen crags. A rope had been caught upon an upper spire. David held the lower end of the rope.

And up there on the rope a little flag was flying! Waving triumphantly in the wind; vivid, resplendent in the white searchlight glare. Claiming this golden mountain, so that the Chilean officials on the slope could only stand and gaze and salute it with their greetings.

I could see it plainly with the glass. Brilliantly illumined by our clinging searchlight, a crudely fashioned little

flag. Stripes of red and white fabric; a field of blue, with stars!

I PUSHED my way through the crowd of jabbering Chilean officials. A confusion of mingled Chileans and Americans. A glare of white lights. Banners flying; bugles blaring their mingled national salutes.

But the mountain—a mile in radius from this peak—was legally claimed for America!

I came upon Helga. Her outer robe was open. I saw beneath it her heavy red and blue cloak. Pieces of its cloth were cut from it.

"Joe!"

She flung herself into my arms. And then I saw Naina, standing with David, holding the rope from which their flag was flying.

She called to me.

Helga pushed me away. "We made the flag, Joe—cut it out of my cloak and Naina's white robe. And pinned it together. Go tell her how glad you are—our flag—her flag."

She pushed me. I stammered, "Hello, David. Naina, that flag—"

An international official had come with the Chilean expedition. He shoved his way toward us. His recorders, with their books, were at his elbow.

"Who raised this flag?" he demanded.

"I did," said Naina calmly.

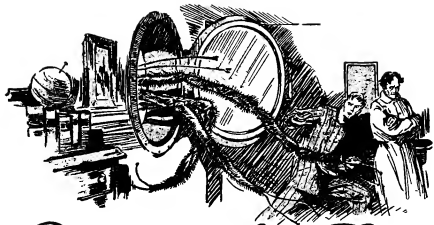
"Who are you?"

"I am Naina, daughter of Judson Roberts of New York City. I was born in unclaimed, neutral Antarctica."

Her glowing eyes turned to David, and then came back to her questioner. Her voice rang clear:

"I am Naina Roberts. I claim this territory for the United States of America. I am an American!"

THE END.



Creatures of the Ray

By JAMES L. ATON

THE true story of the tragedy at Coatsville hasn't yet been printed. Indeed no one knows the truth save me—and I've been keeping still. Our Chicago dailies have headlined the lists of dead and missing, of buildings burned, of heaps of human bones—but no reporter has come within a mile of guessing how it all came to pass.

As for evidence, when the rescuers reached the place, every trace of the Things that caused the rumpus had been destroyed—I saw to that, you know. Most people think that a scientific madman named Gilreath burned up the town and then killed himself.

There are plenty of wild tales, of course. The popular version for the Sunday Supplement is that there was an invasion of Martians—who came, destroyed, disappeared. Then there's the theory that Gilreath was experimenting with a synthetic man who ran amuck, a sort of mechanical Mr. Hyde. But as for the truth—

It's time it was told; so here it is:

Thinking people must be made to realize the danger we're in, must put a muzzle on our scientific investigators, before some wild one mixes the wrong blends of atoms in his laboratory and blows up the earth.

I'm only a newspaper reporter, so I'll not attempt a scientific treatise. My tale begins one morning last July, when I was summoned to conference with my chief—Gregor of the *Chicago World*.

"You're to get an interview with Professor Gilreath," he said.

"Gilreath?" I repeated puzzled. "I don't recall the name."

"He's a scientist," explained the chief. "One of the narrow-minded sort who go in for pure science. You know what I mean—a chap who'll spend a lifetime counting the atoms in a grain of salt without ever thinking ahead as to the possible scientific revolution that may follow his finished work."

"The country's full of them," I nodded. "It's those painstaking boys who are making the big discoveries of the day."

"That's my point," said the chief. "That's the very reason I'm giving you this new assignment. From now on you're to watch for these scientific discoveries; get them the day before they're announced. It's a bigger scoop these days to cover a cancer cure than a double murder. But now about this man Gilreath—there have been rumors for a long time that he's on the trail of something big. The Hearst papers have had two men trying to interview him—one of the two is in the hospital—the professor smashed his jaw. He's the sort who dislikes publicity."

"Oh!" I meditated.

"He's been doing radium research," went on Gregor. "He's had one or two dry articles in the scientific journals. One was entitled 'Radium in Evolution,' whatever that may mean. Last year he fell heir to a slice of money and has used it to build an isolated laboratory in a cow pasture down near Coatsville in Jefferson County."

"That's a funny place for a laboratory," I put in. "I'd think—"

"I'm talking!" said the chief shortly; he likes to make long speeches, does Gregor, but can't endure them from any one else. "Gilreath has kept his laboratory a mystery," he went on. "No one but himself ever sets foot in it. He stays there night and day; has his meals brought to the door. And there have been rumors of strange rays coming from his window at night. One cow has been killed supposedly by these rays. You can imagine how curious those small town Hicks must be to have something like that going on in their midst."

"I can," I agreed briefly as Gregor paused. "Where did you get all this dope?"

"From last week's Coatsville *Independent*," answered the chief. "Here's the article. Charley had it clipped to put in his funny column, and I happened to spot it. It looks like something big. I want you to go—now—and don't come back till you get the story."

He swung around to his desk and forgot me. I went.

I stepped off the train at Coatsville late the next afternoon.

"Hotel?" asked the lank driver of the bus; it was an old time bus with horses

such as I hadn't seen for years—"Jefferson House" painted on the sides.

I handed him my suit case.

"Where is Professor Gilreath's place?" I asked.

"Up top of that hill," the bus driver pointed away from town. "On beyond Warren's big farmhouse. Mrs. Warren does his washing and takes him in his meals."

I knew I should have taken time to pump the bus driver for a story; but it was getting toward night, and I had it in mind to have a look at the professor before dark.

"Take my grip to the hotel," I ordered. "I'll be back," and started.

As I went across the track, I heard the bus driver speak to the loafers who were holding up the station. "Another newspaper man," he said. "I reckon we'd better go over there after awhile and pick up what's left of the poor cuss."

"This interview calls for diplomacy," I said to myself.

On my way up the long hill I tried to think of how I should approach Gilreath to save myself from a bust on the jaw. A scheme that I had used one time before with success came into my mind; I decided to give it a try.

Mrs. Warren was opening the mail box at the roadside as I came along. She was a buxom countrywoman with a pleasant face, and she looked at me with friendly curiosity.

"How do you do?" I said. "I'm looking for Professor Gilreath's place."

"Right through that lane," she pointed. "There on top of that hill in the cow pasture."

"That round thing?" I asked.

"That's it," she answered. "Looks like a cheese box—just beyond all those cows."

"I thought he killed a cow," I remarked.

"He did," she confirmed. "Since then half the folks in town have brought their cows out to my pasture."

I looked my incomprehension.

"He paid for the cow," she explained. "Three times what it was worth. He's got lots of money. Everybody's praying his cow will be struck next. They're paying me two dollars a month apiece for the use of my pasture."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "Some kind of ray—in the night. The cow was like ashes."

"Doesn't it make folks mad?" I quizzed her, thinking of the write-up in the Coatesville paper, "having him do things like that? Aren't they apt to run him out of town?"

"Why should they?" she retorted. "He's a nice man, and he minds his own business. Of course, everybody's curious. But they all like the way he handled them pesky newspaper men. You'd better take my advice and stay away—you're a newspaper man, ain't you?"

"I'm a brother scientist," I evaded, and left her.

At the head of the lane I turned and looked back. She was still standing by the mail box looking after me. I fancied that there was pity in her face. Could I have dreamed of how I was to see her again, the pity would have been in my face for her.

I took notice, too, of the Warren house; an immense three-story farmhouse of thirty rooms, big enough for an army. Then I swung round and footed it briskly up the lane.

Gilreath's building reminded me of a picture in my old school history—the round turret of the monitor. It was built of square blocks of concrete, squatting atop the hill, solid and flat as if built to stand the shock of ages. I went up toward it warily, not really afraid, but nervous, apprehending the onslaught of some mystic ray. All was peaceful and still, like a great round tombstone standing impassive upon the eternal hills.

I walked half around it before I came to the door. There were deep-set, tiny, round windows, like the portholes of a ship. The interior, as I found later, was lighted largely by skylights. The oaken door was fast shut. I rang the bell vigorously.

The door slid open on noiseless bearings. I stood confronting the professor.

I've interviewed more than one of our modern ultra-scientists, and I've found the top-notchers either as hairy as gorillas or else as bald as pumpkins. The gorillas are

fiery but sympathetic; the pumpkins are cold and un pitying.

Gilreath was neither, yet his light blue eyes were as hard as steel and his face was like flint. He was dressed all in laboratory white, impersonally professional.

"Yes?" he snapped.

"I have come to see Dr. Gilreath," I answered, putting on my most scientific air.

"Speaking!" he said shortly.

I had read up on the man in *Who's Who* before leaving Chicago, so I felt that my fiction was safe.

"You're invited to honorary membership in the Royal Academy of Science of Copenhagen," I told him.

He stood back and let me enter. The tiny room was like a physician's waiting room; the laboratory lay beyond.

"Sit down!" he motioned me to a chair. "Your name, please?"

"Jonas Olson," I answered. I have yellow hair and felt that I could pass off as a Dane.

"What is the occasion of this invitation?" he quizzed standing before me.

"Your article on 'Radium in Evolution.'"

"You have read it?" he asked; there was a suggestion of wistfulness in his voice.

"Not I!" I answered, playing safe. "We Danes don't take time to read outside our own subject. However, the members of our radium division have read—"

"Your subject?" he broke in.

"Insects." There I felt that I was on safe ground. Gilreath, wrapped up in radium, would surely know nothing about insects. "My specialty is the thought-life of the ant. Perhaps you read my article in the July number of the—"

"No!" he interrupted. "I did not. I am inclined to think that you are an impostor."

"Say—" I stuttered, not knowing what to tell him next.

"That does not matter," he went on ignoring my confusion. "I am now about to undertake the crowning experiment of my work, and I was wishing for a witness when you rang. Whether you are scientist or reporter does not matter—I am glad you are here."

"Is this an experiment with radium?" I asked eagerly, forgetting all my pose.

"No, Mr. Newspaper Man," he sneered. "It is not. I have a new ray—ten thousand times more powerful than radium. You shall see in good season. Are you willing to spend the night?"

"Yes!"

"This way!" he ushered me into an immaculate bathroom. "Clean yourself thoroughly and put on this white coat before you come into the laboratory."

I made haste to obey, exultant at thought of the scoop I was getting for the *World*. After two Hearst men had failed. This was a trip worth while.

"And so—" It was an hour later and Gilreath was coming to the end of a wearisome lecture on radium. Lord only knows how many long-named authorities he had quoted; the whole talk went over my head till it came to his summing up. "Practically every ray-therapist agrees that radium, properly applied, should manifest potential constructive force, that its rays have the power to stimulate growth as regards size, speed and quality."

"Yes," I chipped in as he paused for breath. "That's what Brisbane says."

"I don't know the name!" he snapped. "Who is he?" then went on without waiting for an answer: "Against this accepted theory we must set the fact that such life-giving qualities have never yet been adequately demonstrated—that the sole use made of radium to-day is destructive—in burning away superficial malignant growths such as cancer, and that even there its value is debatable. As far as doing with radium the thing that we say that it can do, we have not even made a start."

"But," I began, "I thought—"

"I isolated myself here for one purpose and only one," he drove right on. "That was to develop a controlled, constructive, beneficial radium ray. Until a month ago such was my sole direction of research. And then of a sudden I made a great new discovery—that the feeble emanations of radium—its beta and gamma rays—were but suggestions of a great, new, all-penetrating, all-powerful, yet perfectly controllable force or ray; and I discovered, overnight

almost, the source of this new force, a source as exhaustless and as universal as sunlight. I am endeavoring to put this in plain unscientific language; do you follow me?"

"You mean that you have perfected a controlled radium ray," I answered. "Was that what killed Mrs. Warren's cow?"

"My ray is not radium," he said, ignoring my question about the cow. "It does all that radium can ever do and infinitely more. I have named it Ray GL. For the purpose that I have in mind it is perfected and controlled; and to-night will see its first demonstration. Scientist though I am, I have not outgrown certain primitive emotions; among them is the human longing for comradeship in a supreme hour. I am yielding to that emotion. I welcome your companionship in this, the great hour of my life. I am glad that you have come."

His tone was as cold as ice; but I fancy his speech of welcome was as warm as any pumpkin scientist could make under the most emotional circumstances on earth. Our universities have been breeding cold-bloods who look on love and friendship as anomalies to be teased under the microscope. Anyway, this was better than being hanged on the jaw and thrown off the place.

I stood about in the way for an hour and watched while the professor made final inspection of his ray machine—a great many-tubed affair of copper like an x-ray apparatus. It was mounted on a wheeled stand and had an adjustable nozzle like the mouth of a camera. I took good care not to get in front of the nozzle; despite my curiosity I had no desire to be cremated along with Mrs. Warren's cow.

"I'll not attempt to explain this to you," said Gilreath shortly. "You could not understand its technicalities. As I have told you, it generates a new ray more powerful than radium. For demonstration I have only to turn it on any organic substance for a stated period and await results. At the strength to which I am adjusting it, I estimate that ten hours will be necessary for it to produce perceptible consequences. The accident with the cow happened when I first assembled the machine.

"It is possible, you understand, to gen-

erate rays strong enough to consume everything under heaven. I have set the dial, as you will note, at AR, and at that strength its force should be wholly beneficial. Turn it to BZ, and I could burn up the whole town of Coatesville in two minutes."

"How far will it shoot?" I asked.

"Its radius is not less than ten miles," he answered. "For to-night—" by now it was dusk—"we will focus it through this window upon the vegetation beneath." He wheeled it to one of the narrow portholes in his laboratory. "This first demonstration will have to do with the common grasses of the field."

"What do you predict will happen?"

"Predictions are silly things," he answered shortly, "fit only for newspaper reporters and politicians. It is enough to know that the ray has begun its work. Tomorrow at daybreak we shall see what we shall see."

I must say that my next hours with the professor bored me unutterably. Our modern scientist who knows only one thing is dreary at the best, and Gilreath was discourteous as well as dreary. I did my best to make talk—about airplanes, about politics, about art.

"I'm not interested," was his stock answer; his tone was that of a misanthrope who soured on the human race.

He'd have been at least humanly endurable if he had shown a he-man interest in the doings of his ray which was beating with invisible force upon a twelve-inch circle of grass just outside the window. For here surely was the creature of his dreams. Had he been human enough to run often to the window and peep out eager for results, I could have understood and sympathized. But instead he ignored it. He had put it to work, and, like the scientist that he was, he was content to wait.

He sat through the evening as cold as ice and as taciturn as a crab. I hated him before our simple supper was half through, and I yawned off to bed at the earliest excuse.

He gave me his own bed in a little room on beyond the lab. I suspect that he sat up through the long night waiting—coldly, unemotionally waiting. Could I have

guessed the coming horror of the morrow, I'd have been sleepless as well, instead of dropping off as I did and snoring all night long.

II.

I WAS in the war zone facing a cloud of poisonous gas. The acrid, musky fumes filled my throat; I coughed, choked, gagged, sickened.

The smell woke me up. I was not in the war zone, I was in Gilreath's bed. But the odor was real, a sickening musky stench that made me gag.

It had been daylight for an hour. I hopped out of bed and began to dress.

"Wonder what dose he's mixing up now?" was my thought; I supposed, of course, that the smell came from some experiment in the lab.

There was one of the deep twelve-inch portholes just opposite my bed. I strolled across to take a peep out while I was buttoning my pants.

The Warren farmhouse stood outlined afar off against the sunrise like a painting in a round frame. Pretty! There are many such pretty homes in rural Illinois. I pulled the round window open on its hinge and stuck my head through to peer at the pasture outside—to see what the professor's ray had done.

"It's done it all right!" I gaped amazedly. "Too strong—always will be!"

The green of the pasture was gone—turned overnight into a plowed and furrowed field. Not plowed, either. I don't mean that. There was a ridge of dirt, a great towering ridge ten feet across, six feet high, running past my window over across the field in a great arc. It had not been thrown up by any conceivable digging tool of man; it was built of symmetrical balls of earth as large as basket balls, fashioned with perfect evenness, stacked high with sloping regularity.

Beyond the ridge was but bare earth, no touch of green. There was something about it all that was sinister and ugly, as desolate as a field in hell.

"God!" I muttered. "He'll have to be stopped; that machine will burn up the earth!"

The smell came stronger on the morning breeze. It seemed to come from the great curving ridge of earth balls. I tried to identify it with the smell of burning, but could not; there was no scorching to this odor; it was simply an abominable, nasty, musky stench.

I turned back to finish dressing, sat down on the edge of my bed and laced my shoes. It stuck in my mind that I had glimpsed something shining white on the ground just beneath my window. I got up, curious to see what it was, stuck my head far through the window and looked down at the ground beneath.

Bones! The skeleton of a quadruped—one of the cows that had been turned sacrificially into the pasture. The bones were as clean as if they had bleached for a year in the Sahara. I peeped farther along the wall—another skeleton and another, lying desolate on the barren earth.

"He'll have some cows to pay for," I thought, and leaned forward looking at them in puzzlement. Why hadn't the all-consuming ray destroyed the bones?"

I got a horried throatful of the musky odor; I choked and coughed.

A Thing—a Creature—appeared of a sudden on the ridge of earth not ten feet from my head. It was as if he had leaped up out of the ground. That was what he had done, I concluded later—come up out of the ground through an opening invisible from my window.

A gas-mask—that was my first impression of the Thing. A face, and yet not a face; a shining, mouthless, noseless expanse of head, two long, snaky, waving arms in the place where should have been his eyes—octopuslike arms longer than my own, damnably threatening.

I drew back in horror, still coughing.

The Thing was at me like a bullet; the legs behind the gas-mask hurled him through the air at my window like the lunge of a rattlesnake. If I hadn't been already drawn in before he struck, he would have had me; my bones would have bleached beside those of Mrs. Warren's cows.

He was too big to get in through my porthole; his head was fifteen inches high at the least; but his legs reached through

—not one of his waving arms which I later saw were antennæ—the front pair of his six long legs which had thrown him at me across the ten-foot space.

Mechanical things, those legs! Jointed like a ship crane's handy steel arm, and yet an unclean brown, covered with a growth that was neither feathers nor hair, an evil growth that exuded sticky, grasping drops of nastiness.

The legs went into my porthole, moved about mechanically, seeking me, came within a foot of my head. Fear gave me resource; I grasped the copper-framed plate-glass window, evading the blind legs, and slammed it shut. It closed on one of the legs. I pushed with all my strength; the copper frame of the window cut through the leg like the stalk of a peony; the lower joint fell at my feet.

The Thing stood on his five sound legs outside the closed window, studying the smooth glass with his quivering antennæ while I locked it firmly shut. He had a great wide mouth, I saw then, a beak, rather, that snapped savagely below his smooth, gas-mask face. His body—six feet long it was, built in segments like three tinker-toys on a string—pulsated with life, gave forth a drumming sound like a part-ridge. Other evil Things answered his signal, a dozen of them; they gathered outside, feeling ominously of the concrete blocks of Gilreath's laboratory.

The severed leg at my feet had hold of me, had the calf of my leg, gripped me. I grabbed Gilreath's umbrella and struck at it viciously, struck it loose and away. It lay quivering on the floor; there was a nasty stickiness on my sock that made me sick.

"How now, Mr. Newspaper Man?"

Gilreath stood in the doorway. There was repressed triumph in his voice. His hand was pointing at the pawing creatures outside the window.

"What are they?" I demanded hoarsely.

"What are they?" He repeated my question as too simple to need a reply.

"Lord, yes!" I cried excitedly. "What are they? Martians? Devils? What? They're like nothing ever seen on earth! They're awful impossibilities."

"Like nothing ever seen on earth," he said my words over, rolling them on his tongue as if they held hidden meaning.

"Confound you!" I shouted. "Can't you talk? We'll have to do something; get away from here and give the alarm. Stop your yapping and get down to facts."

"It is obvious that you lack the scientific mind," he was ignoring the Things outside and studying me as one might a unique specimen. "If you will discontinue your wild shouting for a few moments and concentrate on these phenomena which excite you, the solution will become quickly evident."

I gaped at him angrily.

"You fool!" There was no passion in his voice; only cold judgment. He had hold of my arm, and he was as strong as a horse. "Get into the laboratory here, sit down and keep still. I'll see if I can lecture a little sense into your undeveloped brain."

Four chairs stood in a row on the far side of the lab—observation seats in an experiment station. The professor shoved me forcibly into one of these chairs, then sat down beside me.

"This is a more favorable position from which to observe developments," he said.

I sat looking into a great ten-foot mirror. By some trick of reflection the mirror showed the field just outside the wall—the great, curving ridge of dirt balls, the dozen Things still feeling about my closed window, the white skeletons of the defunct cows. Beyond the ridge was a wide gaping hole in the ground.

As I watched, one of the horrid, six legged Things shot up out of this hole and made off with incredible rapidity across the field. Another followed him, and another—perhaps twenty or thirty in all. They sped off the mirror out of sight.

"We watch Earth's new masters going to their first conquests," said Gilreath sentimentally.

The Things outside my window gave over their investigations and ran down into the hole out of sight. We sat gazing at a barren, grassless field, as desolate as an ash heap.

"What are they?" I asked in agony of mind.

"Visualize, if you will, what took place in the night under my ray," suggested the professor leisurely. "Visualize the grasses springing up to the height of bamboos—an inch in a minute, five feet in an hour. Visualize other things that lived among the grasses growing up likewise."

"The grass has been burned up," I objected.

"The grass has been devoured," he said with quiet positiveness. "Devoured by growing creatures—creatures forced into sudden phenomenal growth by my ray—creatures ravenous for nourishment, devouring the grasses, root and branch, turning carnivorous as they grew and attacking other insects, and then the cows—and still, I fancy, seeking a field for further food."

My imagination struggled at impossibilities. I dared not think.

"Six-legged insects," went on the professor as quietly as if describing a bit of cloth. "Six-legged insects who dig hills in the ground and live in communism, touched in a night into gianthood under my marvelous ray."

"Ants!" I whispered in awe. "Ants! Great Heaven!"

"Ants!" agreed Gilreath. "Long praised by philosophers as the most moral and intelligent of all creatures. And consider this: that with growth in size will follow corresponding growth in intellect. Man has tried and failed—now, under my ray, a new master has risen up to recreate the earth. I wait to—"

That scream! It will ring in my ears forever! Shriek after shriek of frightened madness, blood-curdling, hideous!

I leaped to my feet.

"Ha!" said the professor with cold interest, and leaned forward to watch the mirror.

Came into view two of the hideous gas-mask ants, dragging between them, her face bloody, her clothing rent, her arms half torn from their sockets, her shrieks of madness rending the air, the woman who had fetched us our supper the night before—Mrs. Warren!

"As I thought," approved Gilreath unperturbed.

"Stop them!" I cried; I grasped his ray machine and gave it a pull. "Turn on your rays, burn them up! They'll get us all!"

"If they are more fit than man to prevail—" he began sternly.

I made at him in fury.

But he was ready for me. His hand went up, holding a rubber sack. Choking fumes filled my face. I staggered back, down into unconsciousness. One last glimpse I had ere I fainted of the mirror—a great mass of brown and horrid Things—squirming, fighting for blood!

III.

ONE moment I was lying with my eyes open at Gilreath's back, too drowsy even to think; the next moment memory burned, and I was wide awake. But my strength was missing—the dose he had shot into my lungs had made me as weak as a baby. I could move my head, and think, and observe, but I could not lift my arm or my leg.

Gilreath stood with his hands behind his back meditatively studying the great mirror. My eyes followed his to its panorama-like display.

A pair of the horrid giant ants were smelling idly about at the yawning mouth of their nest; save for them the field was deserted and dead. I saw at my first look a change: for now there were piles of skeletons lying about the mouth of the pit—human skeletons, fifty of them—grown men mostly, but some little children—a great charnel-house of death.

I groaned, deadly sick.

"Ah!" said the professor coldly. "I see you're coming round. You've had a bit of rest—twenty-four hours. Maybe now you can show some sense."

"I can't move," I replied. "I'm sick."

"That will pass soon enough," he said without sympathy.

I jerked my head toward the mirror. "Couldn't you stop them?" I asked.

"I had no desire to stop them," answered Gilreath. "I have been studying, observing, thinking, visualizing the future of the world."

"They're cannibals," I pleaded.

"They are not," he said crisply. "You are mistaken in your term. They devour men, but they are not cannibals, they do not devour one another."

"You saw them do it!" I accused. My voice was hoarse.

"It was worth seeing," he said unfeelingly. "Last evening the men of New Galilee organized a punitive expedition against the ants. They were armed with guns and clubs, the ants had only their legs. It was a good fight; I was proud of my insect protégés. They won in a walk; teamwork, coöperation, added to their incredible speed."

"They'll bring troops," I reasoned.

"The troops will not come for a few days," he retorted. "Before then we'll be ready for them. My immediate problem is to get into intelligent communication with the ants that I may prepare them for the fight. They'll have the use of my Ray GL—it will wipe out any troops that come within ten miles."

"My God!" I cried angrily. "You—you—"

"Silence!" he broke in sternly. "I have no use for your silly sentiment. You are a worshiper of man as the supreme being. Silly! Man has made a failure with the earth: turned it into a shambles, destroyed all life that he could not enslave; worse than that, lifted his hand against his own brother in endless war. Wherever two men meet there is discord, strife, murder. With such a race progress is impossible."

He gestured wildly as he spoke; there was a burning, dancing madness in his light blue eyes. I began to understand—the man was a maniac, yet a maniac with wit and intelligence to make his distorted dreams come true. I grew sick at the thought—man's beautiful world turned into a great stinking ant-hill.

"This, my new creation—" the professor motioned toward the mirror. "Behold him! Intelligence greater already than our own and growing apace. I have been studying them from afar through the window. This first day, of course, their need of food has rendered them ravenous, unreasoning. But that stage is passing; they are begin-

ning thoughtfully to adjust themselves to their new environment. Already they have taken possession of the Warren house, their eggs and pupæ are in every room. To-day I saw two of them turning the wheels on a lumber wagon, grasping the lesson of transportation.

"They open and close the doors and windows of the house. Presently they, too, will begin to build, or rather their men slaves will build under their guidance. The Warren barn is full of their captives. This morning for the first time they did not devour them bodily; instead they drew a measure of blood from each one, then stanching the bleeding, reserving them alive for future use. So you see—"

"The women!" I broke in; it was useless to plead, but I could not be silent. "For God's sake, think of the women!"

My words threw the professor into a frothing fit of rage.

"Woman!" he cried bitterly, standing above me with waving fists. "Woman! What is she? The crowning failure of civilization, flaunting the secrets of sex in the market-place! Calling to all the lower passions of man, violating all the purposes of creation. Prating of love—and when a true man offers her true love, casting him aside for a pot of gold!"

"You fool!" I cried angrily; I had grown reckless of life, if I might but sting this madman into sanity. "You're cheap. Because you've been jilted, taking it out on the whole human race. For shame!"

"If I have had an unfortunate personal experience," his tone grew suddenly cold and deliberate, and his cold blue eyes ate into my own, "it has but served to open my eyes to the wider truth. All the more reason that I should lend myself as servants to these—" he motioned toward the mirror—"to these wonderful creatures who exalt and glorify the majesty of sex."

My very soul fainted within me. It was all so incredible, preposterous—this scientific madman lending all his intellect to destroy the human race. I closed my eyes in bitterness of spirit.

"I shall take the first steps to-day to establish communications," his voice came to my ears, as he paced thoughtfully back

and forth. "As soon as you get up a bit more strength, I shall send you out as my ambassador—to try out the methods that I have planned before I risk myself. I must make them see that my service to them is to be that of the intellect, to aid them in their climb toward civilization. I'll make them see it, never fear. They have wonderful sense, none of man's silly conflicts and warfare, only peaceful communism and coöperation—a oneness of mind and soul that will make war forever impossible."

My eyes opened to the realization that the great mirror was alive with life. A thousand great, horse-size, octopus-armed ants were struggling for place; and I saw that part were brown like those I had seen first; and the rest were red, slightly smaller than their cousins, but fiercer and nakeder looking, and that the browns and the reds were locked in fiery conflict.

"They're fighting now!" I cried.

He swung about and looked in amazement at the mirror, then ran across to his radium machine and inspected it hurriedly.

"It's been shifted," I heard him mutter. "It's been sighting at the hill across the river—this is another tribe grown up. I mustn't let them fight; it will upset all—"

He dashed from the room. I heard the creak of an opening door.

I saw him rush into sight on the mirror into the midst of the great army of struggling ants.

"Don't fight!" I heard him shout; he was crazy, you know, as wild as a loon. "Don't fight! Coöperate! Wait! I'll tell you how!"

They didn't listen, didn't wait. He went down under a great rushing horde. The last I saw of him was his arm, ripped like a morsel of cloth from his body, gripped in a gas-mask jaw.

My strength came back all at once to meet the crisis. I leaped to my feet. I've been panicky sometimes in my life, but in that supreme hour my mind was as clear as a bell, my self-control perfect.

I ran across to the ray machine, sighted it through the window—remembering Gilreath's instructions—and turned its dial to the maximum force of BZ.

Death leaped from its nozzle like a flame. The ants whom it struck disappeared on the instant, burned into nothingness. Calmly, coolly, deliberately, I swung the nozzle back and forth, up and down. In thirty seconds the field was won—burned into desolate blackness of ashes.

I swung it across at the great Warren farmhouse which leaped on the touch into flames, swung it across the valley at the breeding place of the red ants, then paused and looked through Gilreath's glasses to make sure that my work was complete.

There were ants in the streets of Coatsville, and I trained my rays on them. I saw a trail of red ants along the riverbank, and as I burned them, the rays struck the water and threw it up in a hissing cloud of steam. I clenched my teeth and swore and stayed on the job; I made sure that Jefferson County was thoroughly sterilized before at last I smashed the machine.

IV.

It was only two days ago that they let me out of Augustana Hospital. Gregor had me sent there when I got back to Chicago—wide-eyed, trembling. For six weeks they had me strapped to my bed. I think

that Gregor told them I had been drinking bad hooch.

He came to my bedside once a week; and when I tried to report on my assignment, a fresh young interne came along and put a hypodermic into my arm. Perhaps his method as well as his intention was all right; I was crazy, I know, and I came near staying so.

"Shut up!" was what the chief said yesterday when I went up to the office and started to talk. "If you don't, I'll send you back to the hospital. You may be telling the truth, but you can't stand the strain of talking about it. Rest up for a week, and I'll assign you to police court."

I was digging through the files reading the bunk that had been printed about Coatsville when Bill Marvin came past.

"I'm off for Ann Arbor," he said. "Some professor in the college there claims he has a radium ray that will make things grow. I've got to get him."

"Go to it!" I growled. "Get him! Get him with a gun!"

And that's pretty close to what I meant. We've got to begin to put a check on these scientific investigators—before some wild bird hits on the ultimate secret in his laboratory and blows up the earth.

THE END



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